



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

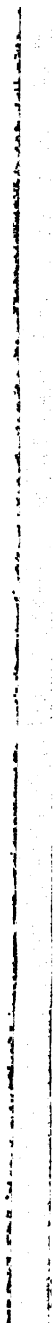
NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES



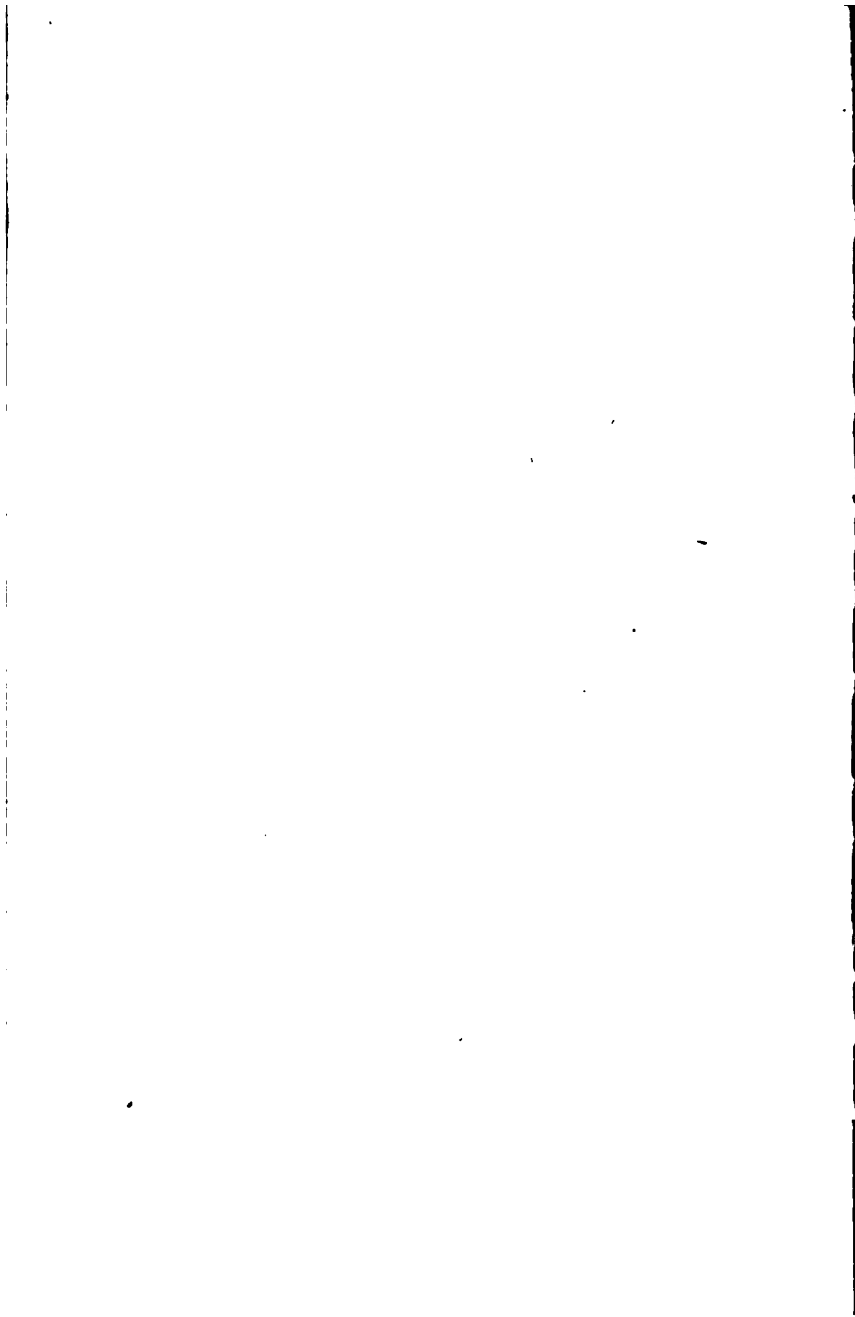
3 3433 07607435 4

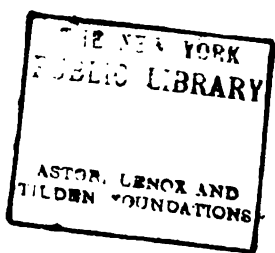






THE LOST DESPATCH







"As Lloyd bent forward . . . he received a crashing blow on the temple."

[PAGE 7]

618127
1106

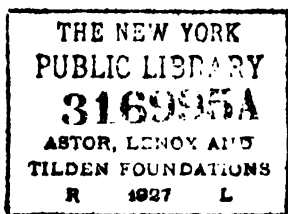
THE LOST DESPATCH

BY
NATALIE SUMNER LINCOLN
AUTHOR OF "THE TREVOR CASE"



THE NEW YORK BOOK COMPANY
NEW YORK

NEW YORK
1911
1000



COPYRIGHT, 1923, BY
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY

Printed in the United States of America

ROY WEN
CLUB
VIA 1921

TO
A GALLANT SOLDIER OF THE UNION
BRIGADIER-GENERAL
SUMNER H. LINCOLN
U. S. ARMY
WHO FOUGHT IN TWO WARS UNDER THE FLAG
THIS NOVEL OF 1865 IS AFFECTIONATELY
DEDICATED

**"Love rules the court, the camp, the grove
And men below, and saints above."**

SIR WALTER SCOTT.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE PIGEON'S FLIGHT	1
II. BRAINS VS. BRAWN	8
III. A KNOT OF RIBBON BLUE	19
IV. BANQUO'S GHOST	30
V. A SCRAP OF PAPER	46
VI. THE SIGNAL LIGHT	51
VII. THE MISCHANCES OF A NIGHT	57
VIII. A VOICE FROM THE PAST	64
IX. OUTWITTED	75
X. THE FORTUNES OF WAR	87
XI. WHO LAUGHS LAST	95
XII. THE FIGHT AT THE FORD	112
XIII. FOR THE CAUSE	120
XIV. WHEN TRAGEDY GRINS	134
XV. NEMESIS	144
XVI. A TANGLED SKEIN	161
XVII. IN CLOSE CONFINEMENT	168
XVIII. WHEN DOCTORS DISAGREE	176
XIX. GROPING IN THE DARK	186

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
XX. THE TURNING POINT	197
XXI. THE TRIAL	210
XXII. WEAVING THE WEB	229
XXIII. SENSATIONAL EVIDENCE	245
XXIV. A STARTLING DISCOVERY	257
XXV. A THUNDERBOLT	268
XXVI. BY A HAIR'S BREADTH	282
XXVII. WITH MALICE TOWARD NONE	300

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	FACING PAGE
"As Lloyd bent forward . . . he received a crashing blow on the temple" . . . <i>Frontispiece</i>	
"'You? Nancy!' The doctor gazed incredulously"	68
"'I—I—am' afraid he is dead' "	116
"Another interruption stopped her . . . A hesitating step crossed the threshold"	278

THE LOST DESPATCH

CHAPTER I

THE PIGEON'S FLIGHT

IT was bitterly cold that December night, 1864, and the wind sighed dismally through the Maryland woods. The moon, temporarily obscured by heavy clouds, gave some light now and then, which but served to make the succeeding darkness more intense. Suddenly the silence was broken by the clatter of galloping hoofs, and two riders, leaving the highway, rode into the woods on their left. The shorter of the two men muttered an oath as his horse stumbled over the uneven ground.

"Take care, Symonds," said his companion quickly, and he ducked his head to avoid the bare branches of a huge tree. "How near are we now to Poolsville?"

"About seven miles by the road," was the gruff reply; "but this short cut will soon bring us there."

THE LOST DESPATCH

And none too soon," he added, glancing at their weary horses. "Still, Captain Lloyd, we have done a good night's work."

"I think Colonel Baker will be satisfied," agreed Lloyd.

"And friend Schmidt, now that he sees the game is up, will probably turn state's evidence."

Lloyd shook his head. "I doubt if Schmidt can tell us much. He is too leaky a vessel for a clever spy to trust with valuable information."

"But," objected Symonds, "that is a very important paper you found in his possession to-night."

"True; but that paper does not furnish us with any clue as to the identity of the spy in Washington. Schmidt is simply a go-between like many other sutlers. Probably that paper passed through three or four hands before it was given to him to carry between the lines."

"Well, there is one thing certain; Baker will make Schmidt talk if any man can," declared Symonds. "May I ask, Captain, why we are headed for Poolesville?"

"Because I am looking for the man higher up. I expect to get some trace of the spy's identity in or around Poolesville."

"You may," acknowledged the Secret Service

THE PIGEON'S FLIGHT

agent doubtfully; "and again you may not. Poolesville used to be called the 'rebs' post-office,' and they do say that word of every contemplated movement of McClellan's army was sent through that village to Leesburg by the 'grape-vine telegraph.'"

"Yes, I know," was the brief reply. The two men spoke in lowered tones as they made what speed they could among the trees. "By the way, Symonds, has it ever been discovered who it was delayed the despatch from Burnside, asking for the pontoon bridges?"

"No, never a trace, worse luck; but do you know," drawing his horse closer to his companion, "I think that and the Allen disaster were accomplished by one and the same person."

"Those two and a good many others we haven't yet heard of," agreed Lloyd. "In fact, it was to trace this particular unknown that I was recalled from service at the front by Pinkerton, and detailed to join the branch of the Secret Service under Colonel Baker."

"We have either arrested or frightened away most of the informers inside the city," volunteered Symonds, after a brief silence. "Besides which, Washington is too well guarded nowadays—two years ago was a different matter. Now,

THE LOST DESPATCH

the general commanding the Maryland border patrols declares that a pigeon cannot fly across the Potomac without getting shot."

Lloyd's answer was lost as Symonds' horse stumbled again, recovered himself, and after a few halting steps went dead lame. In a second Symonds had dismounted, and, drawing off his glove, felt the animal's leg.

"Strained a tendon," he growled, blowing on his numb fingers to warm them. "I'll have to lead him to the road; it is over there," pointing to a slight dip in the ground. "You go ahead, sir; it's lucky I know the country."

As the two men reached the edge of the wood and stood debating a moment, they were disturbed by the distant sound of hoof beats.

"Get over on that side of the road," whispered Lloyd, "and keep out of sight behind that tree; leave your horse here."

Symonds did as he was told none too soon. Around the bend of the road came a horseman. Quickly Lloyd's challenge rang out:

"Halt, or I fire!"

As he spoke, Lloyd swung his horse across the narrow road.

Swerving instinctively to the right, the newcomer was confronted by Symonds, who had

THE PIGEON'S FLIGHT

stepped from behind the tree, revolver in hand. An easy target for both sides, the rider had no choice in the matter. Checking his frightened horse, he called:

"Are you Yanks or rebels?"

Symonds lowered his revolver. He knew that a Confederate picket would not be apt to use the word "rebels."

"We are Yanks," he answered, "and you?"

"A friend."

"Advance, friend," ordered Lloyd, "but put your right hand up. Now," as the rider approached him, "where did you come from, and where are you going?"

"From Harper's Ferry, bearing despatches to Adjutant-General Thomas in Washington from General John Stevenson, commanding this district."

"How did you come to take this cut?" demanded Symonds.

"I rode down the tow path until I reached Edward's Ferry, then cut across here, hoping to strike the turnpike. It's freezing on the tow-path." As he spoke the trooper pulled the collar of his heavy blue overcoat up about his ears until it nearly met his cavalry hat.

The clouds were drifting away from before the

THE LOST DESPATCH

moon, and a ray of light illuminated the scene. Lloyd inspected the trooper suspiciously; his story sounded all right, but . . .

"Your regiment?" he asked.

"The First Maryland Potomac Home Brigade, Colonel Henry A. Cole. I am attached to headquarters as special messenger."

"Let me see your despatch."

"Hold on," retorted the trooper. "First, tell me who you are."

"That's cool," broke in Symonds. "I guess you will show it to us whether you want to or not. Seems to me, young man," glancing closely at the latter's mount, "your horse is mighty fresh, considering you have ridden such a distance."

"We in the cavalry know how to keep our horses in good condition, as well as ride them." The trooper pointed derisively at Symonds' sorry nag standing with drooping head by the roadside.

"None of your lip," growled Symonds angrily; his poor riding was a sore subject. Further discussion was cut short by Lloyd's peremptory order:

"Come; I am waiting; give me the despatch," and, as the trooper still hesitated, "we are agents of the United States Secret Service."

"In that case, sir." The trooper's right hand

THE PIGEON'S FLIGHT

went to the salute; then he unbuttoned his coat, and fumbled in his belt. "Here it is, sir."

As Lloyd bent forward to take the expected paper, he received instead a crashing blow on the temple from the butt end of a revolver, which sent him reeling from the saddle. . At the same time, Symonds, who had hold of the trooper's bridle, was lifted off his feet by the sudden rearing of the horse, and before he had collected his wits, he was dashed violently to one side and thrown on the icy ground.

Symonds staggered to his feet, but at that instant the trooper, who was some distance away, swerved suddenly toward the woods, and his broad cavalry hat was jerked from his head by a low-hanging branch. His horse then bolted into the middle of the road, and for a second the trooper's figure was silhouetted against the sky in the brilliant moonlight. A mass of heavy hair had fallen down the rider's back.

"By God! It's a woman!" gasped Symonds, as he clutched his revolver.

A shot rang out, followed by a stifled cry; then silence, save for the galloping hoof beats growing fainter and fainter down the road in the direction of Washington.

CHAPTER II

BRAINS VS. BRAWN

UP Thirteenth Street came the measured tread of marching feet, and two companies of infantry turned the corner into New York Avenue. The soldiers marched with guns reversed and colors furled. A few passers-by stopped to watch the sad procession. Suddenly they were startled by peal on peal of merry laughter, which came from a bevy of girls standing in front of Stuntz's notion store. Instantly two officers left their places by the curb and walked over to the little group.

"Your pardon, ladies," said Lloyd sternly. "Why do you laugh at a soldier's funeral?"

The young girl nearest him wheeled around, and inspected Lloyd from head to foot.

"What's that to you, Mr. Yank?" she demanded impudently.

"Nothing to me, madam; but for you, perhaps, Old Capitol Prison."

BRAINS VS. BRAWN

"Nonsense, Lloyd," exclaimed his companion, Major Goddard. "I am sure the young ladies meant no intentional offense."

Lloyd's lips closed in a thin line, but before he could reply a girl standing in the background stepped forward and addressed him.

"We meant no disrespect to the dead," she said, and her clear, bell-like voice instantly caught both men's attention. "In fact, we did not notice the funeral; they are, alas, of too frequent occurrence these days to attract much attention."

"Ah, indeed." Lloyd's tone betrayed his disbelief. "And may I ask what you were laughing at?"

"Certainly; at Misery."

"Misery?" Lloyd's color rose. He hated to be made ridiculous, and a titter from the listening girls roused his temper. "Is that another name for a funeral?"

"No, sir," demurely; "it is the name of my dog."

"Your dog?"

"Yes, my pet dog. You know, 'Misery loves company.'" The soft, hazel eyes lighted with a mocking smile as she looked full at the two perplexed men. "I'm 'company,'" she added softly.

THE LOST DESPATCH

In silence Lloyd studied the girl's face with growing interest. A vague, elusive likeness haunted him. Where had he heard that voice before? At that instant the glint of her red-gold hair in the winter sunshine caught his eye. His unspoken question was answered.

"Who's being arrested now?" asked a quiet voice behind Lloyd, and a man, leaning heavily on his cane, pushed his way through the crowd that had collected about the girls. The slight, limping figure was well known in every section of Washington, and Lloyd stepped back respectfully to make room for Doctor John Boyd. It was the first time he had seen the famous surgeon at such close quarters, and he examined the grotesque old face with interest.

Doctor Boyd had lost none of the briskness of youth, despite his lameness, nor his fingers their skill, but his face was a mass of wrinkles. His keen, black eyes, bristling gray beard, predatory nose, and saturnine wit, together with his brusque manner, made strangers fear him. But their aversion was apt to change to idolatry when he became their physician.

"What, Nancy Newton, you here?" continued the surgeon, addressing the last speaker, "and Belle Cary? Have you two girls been sassing

BRAINS VS. BRAWN

our military friends?" indicating the two officers with a wave of his hand.

"Indeed, no, Doctor John," protested Nancy; "such an idea never entered our heads. But these gentlemen don't seem to believe me."

Major Goddard stepped forward, and raised his cap.

"The young lady is mistaken, doctor," he said gravely. "We do believe her, notwithstanding," glancing quizzically at Nancy, "that we have not yet seen her dog."

"Misery!" exclaimed the surgeon, laughing. "So my four-footed friend has gotten you into hot water again, Nancy? I might have known it. Here's the rascal now."

Around the corner of Twelfth Street, with an air of conscious virtue, trotted the cause of all the trouble—a handsome, red-brown field spaniel. Robert Goddard, a lover of dogs, snapped his fingers and whistled, but Misery paid not the slightest attention to his blandishments. Wagging his tail frantically, he tore up to Nancy, and frisked about her.

"Misery, give me that bone." Nancy stooped over, and endeavored to take it from the struggling dog. "I cannot stop his eating in the streets. Oh, he's swallowed it!" Misery choked

THE LOST DESPATCH

violently, and looked with reproachful eyes at his mistress. "You sinner," patting the soft brown body, "come along—that is," addressing Lloyd, "if you do not wish to detain us any longer."

"You are at liberty to go." Lloyd bowed stiffly.

"Hold on, Nancy; if you have no particular engagement, come with me to my office. I have a bottle of medicine to send your aunt," exclaimed Doctor Boyd hastily. "Good evening, gentlemen." And he bowed curtly to Lloyd and his friend.

On reaching F Street, the group of girls separated, and Nancy accompanied Doctor Boyd to his office.

"Go into the waiting room, Nancy," directed the surgeon. "It won't take me a moment to write the directions on the label of the bottle."

Obediently Nancy entered the room, followed by Misery, and as the surgeon disappeared into his consulting office, she glanced keenly about her. The room was empty. Quickly she bent over her dog, and took off his round leather collar. Another searching glance about the room; then from a hollow cavity in the round collar, the opening of which was cleverly concealed by

BRAINS VS. BRAWN

the buckle, she drew a tiny roll of tissue paper. Opening it, she read:

Find out Sheridan's future movements. Imperative.
George Pegram.

Nancy dropped on her knees before the open grate, tossed the paper into the glowing embers, and watched it burn to the last scrap. A cold, wet nose against her hand roused her.

"Misery, you darling." She stooped, and buried her face in the wriggling body. "My little retriever!" Misery licked her face ecstatically. "If I only knew which way Sam went after giving you that message for me, much valuable time could be saved. As it is——" Doctor Boyd's entrance cut short her whispered words.

Lloyd and his friend, Major Goddard, watched Nancy and her companions out of sight; then continued on their way to Wormley's Hotel, each busy with his own thoughts. The grill room of that famous hostelry was half empty when they reached there, and they had no difficulty in securing a table in a secluded corner. While Lloyd was giving his order to the waiter, Colonel Baker stopped at their table.

"Heard the news?" he asked eagerly; then

THE LOST DESPATCH

not waiting for an answer: "They say at the department General Joe Johnston has been captured."

His words were overheard by Wormley, the colored proprietor, who was speaking to the head waiter.

"'Scuse me, Colonel Baker," he said deferentially. "You all ain't captured General Johnston. No, sah. I knows Marse Joe too well to b'lieve that."

Wormley was a privileged character, and his remark was received with good-natured laughter. Under cover of the noise, Baker whispered to Lloyd: "*Stanton has discovered his cipher code book has been tampered with.* Meet me at my office at five o'clock."

"All right, Colonel," and Baker departed.

By the time they had reached dessert, the grill room was deserted. Goddard lighted a cigar, and, lounging back in his chair, contemplated his host with keen interest.

"I can't understand it, Lloyd," he said finally.

"Understand what?" replied Lloyd, roused from his abstraction.

"Why you became a professional detective. With your social position, talents . . ."

"That's just it!"

BRAINS VS. BRAWN

"What?"

"My talents. If it had not been for them, I would have gone to West Point with you, Bob. But, above all else in the world I enjoy pitting my wits against another's—enjoy unravelling mysteries that baffle others. To me there is no excitement equal to a man hunt. I suppose in a way it is an inheritance; my father was a great criminal lawyer, and his father before him. When Pinkerton organized the Secret Service division of the army in '61, I went with him, thinking I could follow my chosen profession and serve my country at the same time. Besides," with a trace of bitterness in his voice, "I owe society nothing; nor do I desire to associate with society people."

Goddard gazed sorrowfully at his friend. "Hasn't the old wound healed, Lloyd?" he asked softly.

"No; nor ever will," was the brief response, and Lloyd's face grew stern with the pain of other years. "As I told you, Bob, I was detailed here to solve a very serious problem for our government," he resumed, after a slight pause. "Baker has rounded up and arrested all persons suspected of corresponding with the rebels, and sent some to Old Capitol

THE LOST DESPATCH

Prison, and others through the lines to Richmond, where they can do us no harm. Most of these spies gave themselves away by their secesh talk, or by boasting of their ability to run the blockade.

"But information of our armies' intended movements is still being carried out of Washington right under Baker's nose. It is imperative that this leak be stopped at once, or the Union forces may suffer another Bull Run. Baker and the provost marshal of the district have tried every means in their power to learn the methods and the identity of this spy, but so far without success."

"But have you found no trace in your search?" inquired Goddard eagerly.

"Until to-day I had only a theory; now I have a clue, a faint one, but——" Lloyd paused and glanced about the room to see that he was not overheard. They had the place to themselves, save for their waiter, Sam, who was busy resetting a table in the opposite corner. "I have told you, Bob, how I came to get this wound"—Lloyd touched his temple—"when on my way to Poolesville." Goddard nodded assent. "But I did not tell you that before the supposed trooper made good his escape his hat was knocked

BRAINS VS. BRAWN

off and Symonds saw that the spy was a woman."

"A woman!" Goddard nearly dropped his cigar in his astonishment. "How did he find that out?"

"Her hair fell down her back when her hat was knocked off."

Goddard stared at his companion. "Well, I'll be—blessed!" he muttered.

"I have been looking for such a woman for some time, and until to-day without success," declared Lloyd calmly.

"Did she by chance leave any trace, any clues, behind her in her flight?"

"One." Lloyd pulled out his leather wallet. "On examining the hat, which he picked up on his return to where I was lying unconscious, Symonds found these hairs adhering to the lining. He put them in an envelope and brought them to me at the hospital." Lloyd drew out a small paper, which he opened with care. "Have you ever seen hair of that color before?"

Goddard took the opened paper, and glanced at its contents. A few red-gold hairs confronted him. Instantly his thoughts flew to the scene of that morning. In his mind's eye he saw the laughing face, the lovely curly Titian hair, and

THE LOST DESPATCH

heard the mocking, alluring voice say: "I'm company." He slowly raised his head in time to see the steady gaze of their negro waiter fixed full upon the paper in his hand.

CHAPTER III

A KNOT OF RIBBON BLUE

I AM so glad to see you, Major Goddard," said his hostess, stepping into the hall to greet the young officer, as the black butler admitted him. "It is a shame you could not get here in time to take supper with us."

"You are not half as disappointed as I, Mrs. Warren," replied Goddard, shaking hands warmly. "I was unavoidably detained at the War Department. Do please accept my sincere apologies for my unintentional rudeness."

"Why, of course; I was sure you could not help the delay. But I must not keep you standing in the hall." And she reëntered the parlor, closely followed by Goddard, who glanced about the room with well-bred curiosity.

It was the first time he had been entertained while in Washington. Senator Warren, to whom he had brought letters from mutual friends in the North, had insisted upon his waiving the formality of a first call. The invitation to supper had

THE LOST DESPATCH

been seconded by a cordial note from Mrs. Warren, whom he had met two nights before at the Capitol, and he had accepted the invitation, not counting on the exigencies of the War Department.

The large rooms were comfortably filled with men and women, who sat or stood talking together in little groups. In the further corner a girl was seated at the grand piano; as she raised her head, Goddard recognized Nancy Newton. Mrs. Warren was on the point of introducing him to several of her guests when Nancy struck a few opening chords. Instantly the low hum of conversation ceased, and her clear mezzo-soprano voice filled the room:

He stole from its nest in my golden hair,
A knot of ribbon blue;
He placed on my hand a jewel rare,
And whispered soft, as he held it there,
"Tender and true,
Adieu, adieu!"

Drawn by the charm of her voice, Goddard edged nearer and nearer the piano until he leaned against its side facing the singer. He scanned intently the downcast face, the soft, rippling hair, the broad brow, and sensitive red lips.

A KNOT OF RIBBON BLUE

Attracted by the steadiness of his gaze, she raised her eyes to his. For one brief second soul gazed into soul; then the hazel eyes fell before the gray ones, and a rich wave of color mantled Nancy's cheeks as her voice rose in birdlike notes:

They brought my soldier home to me,
And my knot of ribbon blue;
But the cruel wound on his brow was hid
By the flag draped over the coffin lid!
Tender and true,
Adieu, adieu!

Silence followed the last note as it died away, for the song struck home. Northern and Southern sympathizers alike swallowed a suspicious lump as they thought of their loved ones far away on a field of strife, and the applause was late in coming.

"Upon my soul, Nancy, that is a doleful song." Doctor Boyd strode over to the piano. "Give us something cheerful. Play 'Dixie.'"

"Indeed, you will do nothing of the sort," declared Mrs. Warren, as Nancy's fingers strayed over the keys. "Do you suppose I want the provost marshal's men camping on my doorstep? Play 'Yankee Doodle' if you wish; but first, Nancy, I want you to meet Major Goddard—

THE LOST DESPATCH

Miss Newton. Doctor Boyd, this is our friend Major Goddard, who is here on leave."

Nancy simply bowed in acknowledgment of the introduction, but Doctor Boyd held out his hand in hearty greeting.

"Glad to meet you, Major." Seeing Goddard's face more clearly as a guest moved from before one of the lamps, he added: "Why, you are the officer who wished to arrest us this morning, eh, Nancy?"

"Oh, no, sir," protested Goddard hastily. "Captain Lloyd and I simply wanted to—to —"

"Don't apologize," retorted the doctor. "Stanton would like nothing better than to send me to Old Capitol Prison; but they can't spare my services, so I am left free to practice my profession."

"What are you growling about now?" asked Senator Warren, reaching around the doctor to shake hands with Goddard. "Has my wife left you to the tender mercies of Doctor John, Major? Come on, and I will introduce you to Mrs. Bennett."

"From bad to worse," chuckled the doctor. "She will be claiming your scalp, Major. Come to me when you want a hair restorer."

A KNOT OF RIBBON BLUE

Mrs. Bennett, a very pretty woman with mincing manners, received Goddard graciously, and made room for him on the sofa by her.

"Your name is already familiar to us," she said, "for your gallant conduct at Cedar Creek was mentioned in all despatches. Mrs. Arnold," touching a stout woman who sat next her on the shoulder to attract her attention, "may I present Major Robert Goddard?"

"How do you do." Mrs. Arnold held out a fat, jeweled hand in welcome. Her good-natured face was creased in smiles. "My nephew, John Gurley, has spoken of you so often that I feel as if we were old friends."

"That is very kind of you, Mrs. Arnold," said Goddard gratefully. "John gave me a letter of introduction, but I have been so busy since my arrival here I have had no chance to call on you."

"How is John?"

"Very well, and very busy since he has been given his troop."

"Is that the handsome boy who was with you on sick leave last November, Mrs. Arnold?" asked Mrs. Bennett, raising her eyes languidly to look more closely at Goddard. "My husband was quite jealous of his attentions. So absurd, you know. Ah!" She purred as Doctor Boyd

THE LOST DESPATCH

drew up a chair and sat down by her. "My old antagonist! How are you this evening?"

"Still unreconstructed," retorted the doctor. He turned and surveyed the room, brilliant with the glitter of uniforms and handsome toilets, and his penetrating old eyes grew moist as he read the sorrow and anxiety which both men and women hid beneath feverish excitement and forced gayety.

Until the breaking out of the war, Washington was almost entirely a Southern city. After the firing on Sumter, it became a house divided, and brother fought brother, while Washington women stifled their moans of anguish, and faced the world with a bravery which equaled that shown on the battlefield.

"How lovely Nancy Newton looks to-night," went on the doctor, suddenly realizing that Mrs. Bennett was waiting for him to speak.

"I cannot agree with you." Mrs. Bennett's sleepy eyes opened, and the soft purr left her voice. "Those pink roses in her red hair are quite too daring for good taste."

"Daring," echoed Mrs. Arnold, but half catching Mrs. Bennett's remark. "Daring, did you say? Nancy is downright bold. The idea of that young girl going to parties given by the offi-

A KNOT OF RIBBON BLUE

cers in the camps about here. Such conduct would not have been tolerated in my day." And she squared her ponderous shoulders.

"There were no camps in your day, Mrs. Arnold," retorted the doctor dryly. "Nancy was chaperoned there by Mrs. Warren. Do you question our hostess' conduct?"

Alarmed at the very suggestion of such a thing, Mrs. Arnold instantly backed water.

"I—I—was not informed Mrs. Warren went with her. But, Doctor, take a kindly word from me, and warn Nancy that she must be more circumspect in her conduct. She is already being talked about."

"By a lot of scandal mongers, whose word I would not take on oath," exclaimed the doctor hotly.

"One moment, Doctor John," cooed Mrs. Bennett. "It has been whispered that Nancy is suspected of aiding and abetting the enemy, although," spitefully, "she does sing our songs so well."

"And what of that? Half Washington suspects the other half of sending contraband goods through the lines. I don't doubt some of our unimpeachable friends carry quinine concealed in their bustles."

THE LOST DESPATCH

"Well, really, Doctor!" Mrs. Arnold's face rivaled her cherry gown in color. "Such things were not mentioned in my day," she ended feebly.

"Civil war brings strange usages," the doctor smiled grimly, "and to-day's conduct cannot be judged by the standards of the past. I am sorry to shock your sensibilities, but you ladies must not believe all you hear."

"What scandal are you discussing so vigorously?" called Nancy from a near-by window seat.

Mrs. Bennett jumped perceptibly as Nancy's soft voice reached her. "Dear child, how you startle one! Have you been there long?" Her voice rose to a sharper key.

"Miss Nancy and I have just returned from the back parlor," volunteered her escort, a tall officer, wearing the red stripes of the artillery on his well-worn uniform. As he walked toward Mrs. Bennett, she detained him for a moment.

Goddard, who had been an interested listener to the doctor's defense of Nancy, rose from his seat on the sofa, and, seizing his opportunity, stepped over to the alcove and joined the young girl.

"How is my friend, Misery?" he asked.

"Very miserable, indeed, when I left him this

A KNOT OF RIBBON BLUE

afternoon. He does not enjoy being away from me."

"I dare swear he is not alone in that," laughed Goddard. "Won't you sing again, Miss Newton?"

"Not to-night. Are you, by chance, the Major Goddard whom my friend, John Gurley, is always talking and writing about?"

"Yes; John is in my regiment. We are chums, you know."

"I saw a great deal of Captain Gurley when he was with his aunt, Mrs. Arnold, in November. We had great fun together." Nancy laughed at a passing recollection. "In his last letter he urged me to come to Winchester and make a long-promised visit at my cousins, the Pages."

"Why don't you?" asked Goddard eagerly. "We can give you a very good time there. The officers' mess has organized a weekly hop, although girls are scarce, and I am sure we can arrange some other amusements for you."

"I hesitate to make any definite plans," replied Nancy thoughtfully, "for General Sheridan is likely to skedaddle out of the Valley at any moment, and I would not enjoy being captured by Early."

"We are billed to stay there some time

THE LOST DESPATCH

longer," replied Goddard confidently. "The roads are in no condition to move cavalry and artillery. There really is no prospect of our leaving winter quarters until later on."

"In that case I will ask Aunt Metoaca's permission to go."

"I expect to return day after to-morrow, Miss Newton; it would give me great pleasure to escort you to Winchester if you can arrange to go as soon as that."

"I will talk it over with Aunt Metoaca," was Nancy's non-committal reply, and Goddard's face fell.

"May I call and see your aunt?" he pleaded eagerly. "I am sure I can convince her that it is safe for you to make the trip."

"Under your escort," laughed Nancy. In the soft lamplight Goddard caught the witchery of her eyes, and his heart gave a most unaccustomed thump against his ribs. "Take care, sir; you don't know what a grave responsibility you may be assuming."

"I am willing to assume all risks," he answered, a trifle unsteadily. "When can I know that you will go to Winchester?"

Nancy hesitated, and her fingers strayed to a knot of blue ribbon pinned to her gown. Ab-

A KNOT OF RIBBON BLUE

stractedly she unfastened it, and Goddard's hand closed over the ribbon as she murmured: "Come and see my aunt to-morrow. Our address is 306 C Street."

"I am sorry to interrupt"—Goddard wheeled around as Senator Warren joined them—"but a friend has called for you, Major; he says that you are needed at the War Department."

Goddard slipped the knot of ribbon inside his coat as his eyes traveled past the senator's spare figure to a man standing directly under the hall light. It was Lloyd.

Bidding his host and Mrs. Warren a hasty good-bye, Goddard joined his friend, and they departed at once; so absorbed in conversation neither noticed the sudden hubbub that arose in the room they had just left.

"Quick, Doctor; she has fainted!" gasped Mrs. Warren, and Boyd stepped forward to offer first aid to the silent figure on the floor.

CHAPTER IV

BANQUO'S GHOST

ROBERT GODDARD felt at peace with himself and the world as he strolled down Pennsylvania Avenue on his way to the Capitol the next morning. He had spent most of the night explaining to Secretary Stanton the lay of the land in and about Winchester. Having been on many scouting parties under General Torbet, he was well acquainted with the Shenandoah Valley, that "Garden of Virginia," as it was called.

The Avenue was alive with people, and the army uniform predominated, although numerous congressmen hurried by, intent on dodging the mud holes which dotted the streets, so that they might reach the Capitol with fairly clean boots and trousers.

Goddard stopped before the Kirkwood House to watch with much amusement the efforts of several negroes to drag a one-horse hack out of the mud into which it had sunk up to its hubs. Sud-

BANQUO'S GHOST

denly the occupant of the carriage opened the door and beckoned to him. Recognizing Mrs. Bennett, Goddard, with a rueful glance at his immaculate boots, floundered through the mud to the side of the carriage.

"Good morning, Major." Mrs. Bennett held forth a slender hand in greeting. "This is a nice predicament; and I have an important engagement at eleven o'clock."

"It is too bad," sympathized Goddard. "Still, the condition of the Avenue is due to a patriotic cause; the passing back and forth of heavy artillery and cavalry all these years has made it like a ploughed field."

"Mud is not confined to this Avenue," sighed Mrs. Bennett. "Last Sunday my carriage stuck in the middle of H Street right in front of St. John's Church, and my husband had to carry me to the sidewalk."

"May I do the same now?" inquired Goddard quickly.

Mrs. Bennett hesitated; Goddard's fine physique looked quite equal to the strain of carrying her slight form, but she was not at all certain her husband would approve.

"You are very kind, Major, but——" she began dubiously. "Oh, here is Colonel Bennett."

THE LOST DESPATCH

A tall soldierly man of middle age strode up to the carriage. "My dear, you have arrived just in time to rescue poor me. Major Goddard, my husband. The major has just volunteered to carry me through the mud, Charles."

"Much obliged to you, sir," exclaimed Bennett heartily. "I was passing, and recognized my coachman, so concluded my wife was stuck again. Now, Cora, stand on the step, and I will carry you over to the hotel." And in a few seconds, with Goddard's assistance, Mrs. Bennett was safely deposited on the sidewalk.

"It was a shame, Major, that you had to leave Mrs. Warren's so early in the evening." Mrs. Bennett straightened her clothes as best she could, while she waited for her husband to return from giving directions to the driver of the stalled carriage. "I hope it was no bad news that took you away?"

"Oh, no; Captain Lloyd came to tell me that I was wanted at the department. I am afraid I must be running along, Mrs. Bennett. Will you excuse me?"

"Why, certainly, Major. Many thanks for offering to assist me. I hope you will come and see me before you leave."

Thanking her for the invitation, Goddard

BANQUO'S GHOST

bade Mrs. Bennett and her husband a hasty good-bye, and resumed his interrupted stroll down the Avenue. At the corner of John Marshall Place, he saw two ladies waiting by the curb. As the younger turned toward him, he recognized Nancy, and saw the inevitable Misery sitting close at her side. Quickening his steps, he hastened across the street and joined her.

"This is better luck than I hoped for," he said, his eyes lightening with pleasure. "I planned to call at your house on my return from the Capitol, but now . . ."

"Aunt Metoaca," Nancy smiled demurely as she extricated her hand from Goddard's eager clasp, "may I present Major Goddard? The major has most kindly offered to escort me to Winchester, as I told you last night."

Miss Metoaca Newton inspected Goddard keenly as she returned his low bow. First impressions counted with her. Goddard was also taking stock of Miss Metoaca. He decided in his own mind he had never seen a more angular frame, nor so large a nose as her physiognomy presented.

"I hope you have given your consent to Miss Newton's trip?" he asked eagerly.

"Yes and no." Miss Metoaca's voice sur-

THE LOST DESPATCH

prised him by its thin treble. It did not seem possible that so little sound could come out of so big a cavity. "I don't hold with so much gadding about. 'Twasn't so when I was a girl, fifty-odd years ago. The way women run hither and yon after Tom, Dick, and Harry is surprising. I declare I am the only virgin in Washington these days." She stopped to search in her reticule for her handkerchief. "So I have just decided, as long as Nancy has set her heart on it, to go with her to Winchester. Besides which, I am anxious to see Lindsay Page."

"That is splendid!" Goddard's face lighted with pleasure, then fell. "How about your passes? Shall I ask Secretary Stanton for them?"

"Young man, when I want a thing, I go to headquarters for it; so I am on my way to see President Lincoln now. I reckon he will give them to me. Many thanks, all the same," she wound up, conscious she had been abrupt in her refusal.

"May I walk up to the White House with you, then?"

"I will be glad of your company, but Nancy is not going with me." Her eyes twinkled as she saw Goddard's disappointment. "Secondly, I

BANQUO'S GHOST

am not walking this morning. Nancy is just waiting to put me on that new Yankee contraption, the horse car."

"Here comes one now." Nancy pointed to that slow-moving vehicle as it toiled leisurely up the avenue.

"Of all the miserable inventions," groaned Miss Metoaca, glancing with indignation at the ankle-deep mud that lay between her and the car track. "Why don't they fix it so it can come over here and take in its passengers? What does anyone want with a stationary track way off yonder? Nancy, keep that dratted dog from under my skirts," indignantly, as her hoop tilted at a dangerous angle. "Don't you let him follow me; I won't have mud splashed over my new dress." Nancy clutched Misery's collar obediently. "Well, here goes."

Gathering her ample skirts about her, and with Goddard in close attendance rendering what assistance he could, the spinster plunged through the mud until she reached the car step, by the side of which hung two pictures of a woman, illustrating the proper and improper way to get on and off a car. Miss Metoaca paused to take breath and readjust her Fanchon bonnet. As she was about to enter the car, she noticed a grin-

THE LOST DESPATCH

ning black boy standing with one foot on the step.

"Where's that nigger going?" she demanded of the conductor.

"On top, ma'am," he answered respectfully.

Her question was overheard by a man in clerical dress who sat next the door, and, as she took the seat opposite, he leaned across and addressed her.

"You evidently forget, madam," he said severely, "that the blacks are the Lord's people as well as we, and are entitled to go where we go, being good and free Americans."

"If the good Lord intended those worthless niggers to be my equals, He'd have bleached them out," retorted Miss Metoaca, the light of combat in her eyes. Goddard waited to hear no more, but bolted out of the door and across the Avenue to where Nancy stood waiting, and they walked slowly in the direction of Capitol Hill.

"I am a stranger within your gates," quoted Goddard softly. "Take pity on me, and tell me something about the people I met last night at Mrs. Warren's."

"Let me see, whom did you meet? Oh, yes, Doctor John. He is the most cantankerous and the dearest man I ever met. His patients posi-

BANQUO'S GHOST

tively worship him, and yet he has many enemies who would gladly see him humiliated."

"All strong characters are bound to make enemies, and I dare say Doctor Boyd has a caustic tongue," laughed Goddard, helping Nancy around an extra deep mud hole. "Is Captain Gurley's aunt good fun?"

"Mrs. Arnold?" Nancy dimpled with a merry smile. "She is our 'Mrs. Malaprop.' Her husband secured a big contract to furnish clothing to the government at the breaking out of the war. Now he is very wealthy. Mrs. Arnold does not approve of me."

Goddard colored hotly as he recalled the conversation of the night before. "Why not?" he demanded.

"Because she does not like my friendship with her nephew. When they first came to Washington, the Arnolds lived at the National Hotel, but last year Mr. Arnold bought a vacant lot on our street, and has built a large double house with a ballroom, if you please. I believe Mrs. Arnold is to give her house-warming some time soon. It was she who made the original remark about having a 'spinal staircase in the back,' and Doctor Boyd told her it was quite the proper place for it."

THE LOST DESPATCH

"Is Mrs. Bennett a friend of yours?"

"Mrs. Bennett?" echoed Nancy. "She is Mrs. Arnold's shadow. Aunt Metoaca sees more of her than I do. I somehow don't believe Mrs. Bennett cares for me. She is quite literary in her tastes, and I hear is writing a book about Washington. It ought to prove interesting reading," Nancy's dimples appeared again, "as she imagines every man she meets is in love with her. Her husband, Colonel Bennett, is stationed in the quartermaster general's office, and is just as nice as he can be, and perfectly wrapped up in his pretty wife. They were married about two years ago. Little is known here of Mrs. Bennett's antecedents."

"Which way are you going, Miss Newton?" asked Goddard, as they crossed the street and walked through the Capitol grounds. He looked with admiration at the stately lines of the building which sheltered the law-makers, and bared his head to the Stars and Stripes floating lazily to and fro from the flag poles on each wing of the Capitol. "I can't help it," with a quick, boyish laugh. "I have seen too many die in defense of the flag not to salute it on all occasions."

Nancy nodded comprehendingly. "It is everything to have an ideal," she said softly. "I am

BANQUO'S GHOST

going down A Street to see one of Doctor John's charity patients."

Absorbed in watching his companion, Goddard did not notice the direction they were walking until Nancy called his attention to an unpretentious, rambling building standing on the corner of First and A streets. "Old Capitol Prison," she said, in explanation. "In 1800 it was a tavern; then after the burning of the Capitol by the British it was used by both houses of Congress, hence the name, 'Old Capitol.' "

Goddard stopped and inspected the building with interest. As his eyes passed along the rows on rows of barred windows, he was attracted by the actions of one of the sentries. After watching him for a few seconds, he turned to Nancy.

"Something is wrong over there," he said briefly. "If you will wait here, I will go over and investigate." Without waiting for a reply, he crossed the street and accosted the sentry. "What's the trouble here?"

The sentry wheeled about and swung his bayonet to the charge; then, recognizing the uniform and shoulder straps, he lowered his Springfield and saluted.

"It's the prisoner there, Major," pointing to a woman who was leaning as far out of an open

THE LOST DESPATCH

window on the ground floor as the bars would permit. "I can't make her go back."

"Call the corporal of the guard."

"I have, Major; but the devil a bit of good that did me. She wouldn't pay any more attention to his orders than to mine."

"Well, then, why not stop shouting at the woman, and leave her alone?"

"It's against orders for any prisoner, man or woman, to approach near enough to touch the window sill or the bars. The corporal says I'm to shoot her unless she moves back, and the superintendent says the same. Damn it! Do they think I 'listed to shoot women?" He mopped his heated face. "Last week they court-martialed a guard for not obeying orders; so I must do it." Then, in a loud, authoritative voice, he called, "For the last time, ma'am, get back from that window. I'll count three; then I'll fire. One ——" His rifle jumped to his shoulder, and he took aim. The woman stood as if carved from stone, gazing steadily at the sentry, down whose white face beads of perspiration were trickling. "Two——"

"Wait," whispered Goddard, then shouted: "Look out, madam; there's a mouse!"

With a convulsive start, the woman sprang

BANQUO'S GHOST

back from the window. The sentry dropped the butt of his gun on the sidewalk, and turned gratefully to Goddard.

"Thanks, Major. If that prisoner shows her face again, I'll just start some real mice through the window." And, saluting, he resumed his beat.

Nancy did not wait, but joined Goddard before he could recross the street.

"I go down this way," she said, and Goddard, suiting his step to hers, strolled with her along A Street. "What train do you propose taking to Winchester, Major?"

"The nine o'clock, if that is convenient for you and your aunt."

"Perfectly so." She stopped before an unpretentious house. "Shall we meet at the depot to-morrow?"

"If you will let me, I will call for you and your aunt."

"We shall be delighted." The front door had been opened by a small boy in answer to Goddard's imperative knock. Nancy turned and held out her hand. "Until then—good-bye." And the door slammed shut.

Turning on his heel, Goddard retraced his steps to the Capitol, but when he reached the

THE LOST DESPATCH

building he concluded not to enter, so continued on his way to his boarding house opposite the Ebbitt. On leaving the Capitol grounds, his progress was blocked by a regiment of raw recruits on its way to the front, which halted and "marked time." Their band struck up "Three Hundred Thousand More," and the soldiers instantly sang the stirring words:

We are coming, Father Abra'am, three hundred thousand more,
From Mississippi's winding stream and from New England's shore;
We leave our ploughs and workshops, our wives and children dear,
With hearts too full for utterance, with but a silent tear;
We dare not look behind us, but steadfastly before:
We are coming, Father Abra'am, three hundred thousand more.

You have called us, and we're coming, by Richmond's bloody tide
To lay us down, for Freedom's sake, our brothers' bones beside;
Or from foul treason's savage grasp to wrench the murderous blade,
And in the face of foreign foes its fragments to parade.
Six hundred thousand loyal men and true have gone before;
We are coming, Father Abra'am, three hundred thousand more.

BANQUO'S GHOST

Goddard promptly joined in the singing with others in the crowd which had collected. Suddenly a heavy hand fell on his shoulder, and facing about he found Lloyd standing behind him.

"Come out of this crowd," said the latter, sternly. In silence the two men walked up the Avenue to Third Street, and Lloyd led his companion into that quieter thoroughfare. Looking to see that no one was near enough to hear what he said, he turned savagely on Goddard.

"I should arrest you at once."

Goddard stared blankly at Lloyd, unable to believe his ears.

"On what charge?" he demanded, hotly.

"Aiding and abetting the enemy."

Goddard's face cleared. "You are crazy," he remarked, tersely.

"Am I? We shall see. I warned you Nancy Newton was a spy."

Goddard's eyes snapped angrily, and his color rose.

"Suppose we leave Miss Newton's name out of the discussion," he said, haughtily; then, in a more friendly tone: "Here I am, happy and carefree, and you appear, like 'Banquo's ghost,'

THE LOST DESPATCH

and shout your silly theories, which you admit you can't prove, into my ears."

"My theories do hold water," was the stern reply. "Better for you, you blockhead, if they didn't."

Goddard's face went white. "By heavens! I allow no one to address me in that way. If it wasn't for our long friendship . . ."; his clenched hands finished the sentence.

"It is owing to our old friendship that I haven't had you arrested, Bob," Lloyd spoke more quietly, realizing he had gone a step too far.

"Then explain what your insinuations mean."

"I will. Half an hour ago you were in front of Old Capitol Prison"—Goddard nodded assent—"helping the sentry make that woman behave herself. Well, it was all a plant."

"A plant?"

"Yes. While you and the sentry were engaged with that woman, Nancy Newton was signaling from an opposite doorway to another prisoner in the same row."

Goddard gazed incredulously at Lloyd. "How do you know?"

"I was following you both down the street, and saw the whole affair. I was too far away to interfere, and by the time I had reached the prison

BANQUO'S GHOST

you and your companion were a block away." Goddard stood biting his lip, so Lloyd, after waiting for a reply, continued: "The comedy was well played. Your presence but added realism to it in case passers-by noticed the scene. In some way, she and the woman arranged to engage the sentry's attention while she signaled to the other prisoner; and there you are."

"What are you going to do about it?" asked Goddard; then added stubbornly: "Mind you, Lloyd, I am still convinced Miss Newton is innocent of the grave charge you bring against her. Many Washingtonians have been arrested for various offences and put in the Old Capitol; possibly one of them is a friend of Miss Newton's, and, seeing her standing opposite the prison, seized the opportunity to wave to her." But Lloyd remained obstinately silent, and Goddard repeated his first question, "What are you going to do about it?"

"Arrest her as a suspect. No, on second thoughts, I will leave her free, but watched. Take my word for it, Bob; if you give that clever girl rope enough she will hang herself."

CHAPTER V

A SCRAP OF PAPER

A PENNY for your thoughts, Nancy." Mrs. Warren leaned across the table and addressed her friend.

Nancy started guiltily, and her thoughts returned to her surroundings with a rush. Senator Warren, seated on her left, noticed her confusion, and whispered in her ear:

"Blue or gray?"

"Gray," she answered; then colored hotly as she met his amused gaze.

"You did not notice me this morning," continued the senator, lowering his voice so the others could not hear, "and Major Goddard had eyes but for you—small blame to him!"

Nancy drew a long, slow breath of relief, and the carmine receded from her cheeks.

"Major Goddard is very good-looking," she said composedly. "His coloring is a decided relief from the many blond men one meets now—"

A SCRAP OF PAPER

adays. Blue-black hair and gray eyes are an unusual combination."

"Did you see the President to-day, Senator?" inquired their host, Colonel Mitchell, breaking in on the conversation; and Nancy sat back in her chair, glad of a moment's respite in which to collect her thoughts. Her head ached, and she pushed the soft hair from off her forehead with an impatient hand. Would her chaperone never make the move to leave?

Their table was in one corner, and Nancy sat with her back to the other diners. Mrs. Warren and the two men were soon absorbed in a heated argument as they slowly sipped their coffee. Nancy turned impatiently in her seat, and surveyed the animated scene behind her with restless, tired eyes.

Washington, filled with strangers from all sections of the country lying north of Mason and Dixon's line, was a city of perpetual unrest. Besides the soldiers stationed in the encircling camps and fortifications, regiments were continually passing through the capital on their way to and from the front. Statesmen, government contractors, and shoddy politicians haunted hotel lobbies and restaurants.

Gautier's, where many of the old residents and

THE LOST DESPATCH

statesmen congregated, was more than usually crowded that night, and the Frenchman had difficulty in supplying the wants of his patrons; so earlier in the evening he had engaged extra waiters to meet the emergency.

The stringed orchestra in the gallery ceased playing, and in the momentary lull Nancy's quick ear caught fragments of conversation between two officers seated at the adjoining table. Interested, she gently edged her chair nearer to the men; then, leaning back, pretended to be absorbed in watching some new arrivals, as Sam, who was earning an honest penny by doing extra work on his night off from Wormley's, deftly removed the dessert plates.

"I tell you, Jim," Nancy heard the older officer say positively, "Grant intends to have Sheridan join him as soon as he breaks winter camp."

"Nonsense, nonsense; the strategical movement would be to have him march south and re-enforce Sherman. That would mean the death knell of the Confederacy."

"You are entirely wrong," returned the first speaker heatedly. "Why, man, look here; suppose this pepper-caster is Richmond, this crust Petersburg, this crumb Lee, and this crumb

A SCRAP OF PAPER

Grant—now, bring this crumb, Sheridan . . .” His words were drowned by the strains of “The Girl I Left Behind Me,” and the other diners in the room joined in the chorus.

At the conclusion of the song, Mrs. Warren gathered her belongings together, preparatory to departure. Colonel Mitchell, seeing his guests had finished supper, opened his pocketbook and drew out a roll of bank notes. As he thrust the money back into the pocketbook after paying his bill, a small folded piece of paper dropped unseen, except by Nancy, on the floor close beside her chair.

Like a flash she planted her foot squarely on it. Colonel Mitchell had risen to help Mrs. Warren into her wrap; the senator was busy talking to a newcomer. None of them had noticed her quick action. Dare she stoop over and pick up the paper? As she hesitated, their waiter, Sam, returned with the colonel’s change. Mitchell waved the tray away impatiently, and the negro stepped back, dropping his napkin over Nancy’s foot as he did so.

“Please ’scuse me, missy.” Stooping swiftly, he deftly lifted her foot and removed the paper as he picked up the cloth. “Hyar’s yo’ napkin,” laying it back in her lap; then in a voice that

THE LOST DESPATCH

reached her ear alone, "Look out, yo' am bein' watched."

"Thank you, Sam." Nancy's voice was unruffled as her fingers closed spasmodically over the paper concealed in the napkin. Seeing her friends were still occupied, she seized her chance, and whispered rapidly: "Go to Mr. Shriver's room at Wormley's, search behind the glass in the mirror over his bureau; then bring the paper you will find concealed there to me at the Perrys' to-night." Sam nodded understandingly. Nancy rose. "Senator Warren, will you help me on with my coat."

CHAPTER VI

THE SIGNAL LIGHT

ARE you sure you have made no mistake, Lloyd?" whispered Colonel Baker in his companion's ear.

"Positive, Colonel; I have laid my plans too carefully for that."

The two men were crouching behind a corner of a tumbled-down stone wall. Their position commanded a full view of an old square mansion standing some little distance from B Street. The galleries on the south side of the house overlooked a low, rolling meadow which ran down to the Potomac River.

"Have you no proof against the girl?"

"No tangible proof so far, though I am morally certain she is the cleverest spy of them all."

"Why not arrest her on suspicion?"

"What good would that accomplish? Her family and friends are the most influential in the

THE LOST DESPATCH

District. Without actual proof of her guilt, you could not hold her forty-eight hours."

Colonel Baker moved restlessly. Such tactics were foreign to his nature. He believed in arresting first and investigating afterward. But his department had gone too far in a recent case, and he had been warned by no less a person than the President himself that his high-handed methods would no longer be tolerated.

"My idea is to make her convict herself," resumed Lloyd, after a slight pause.

"And you think your plot is going to work?"

"It has succeeded so far. I found out that Colonel Mitchell was entertaining Senator and Mrs. Warren, and that Miss Newton was to be of the party. The colonel's sentiments for her have changed within the last few days. I shouldn't be surprised if she had snubbed him, and wounded his vanity. Anyway he was quite willing to enter into a little scheme I suggested. I put it on purely patriotic motives, mind you," Lloyd smiled grimly to himself, "that, as a loyal Union officer, it was his duty to assist me. So he wrote a bogus despatch, purporting to come from the adjutant-general, which he was to drop accidentally before Miss Newton, and then give her an opportunity to pick it up."

THE SIGNAL LIGHT

"Did she do it?"

"I am positive she did, although I did not actually see her. I saw Mitchell, who managed it very cleverly, drop the paper, and as they left their table I walked over to it. The paper had disappeared from the floor."

"Why didn't you arrest her then?"

"Because I want to find out her method of passing information on to the rebels. She may have a confederate who would carry out her schemes while she is in prison, and we would be none the wiser and still unable to stop the leak. I judged that the moment Miss Newton had time to read that paper she would instantly try to communicate with the rebels. And I judged rightly." He paused to look up and down the silent street.

"Go on," whispered Baker impatiently.

"Symonds and I shadowed her home. She stayed in the house just long enough to change her dress, then came on here by a circuitous route. She has been in there about ten minutes," nodding his head in the direction of the house.

"I am glad I met you," rejoined Baker grimly. "I enjoy being in at the death. Sure she cannot escape you?"

"The house is surrounded by my men. I am

THE LOST DESPATCH

going to give her a few more minutes before I interrupt her little game."

Somewhere in the neighborhood a dog bayed, but there was no sign of life about the house, except a loose shutter banged dismally to and fro in the cutting east wind. No stars were out, and the men had to strain their eyes to make out objects in the dark. Suddenly Baker clutched Lloyd's arm and pointed to the south. A faint light had appeared from a window over the south portico, which grew brighter as it moved once to the left, then to the right, and then was raised, shedding a brilliant gleam on the deserted galleries.

"Signaling, by God!" swore Baker. "Come, man, in with you."

He started to his feet, but Lloyd pulled him down again.

"Wait," he cautioned. "We can interfere there at any moment." Reluctantly Baker followed his advice. Five minutes, ten minutes passed on leaden feet to the anxious watchers. But their vigil was rewarded. Lloyd touched his companion on the shoulder, and muttered: "If my eyes don't deceive me, here comes some one in answer to that signal."

Baker glanced up the deserted street, and

THE SIGNAL LIGHT

dimly saw a man slowly approaching, apparently picking his way with care. The newcomer was nearly opposite the dilapidated entrance gate, when the side door of the house was cautiously opened and a figure stole out, and, making a quick dash through the gate, collided violently against him.

The Secret Service men were too far away to catch what was said, but they saw the two shake hands. Lloyd's men to the west of the house had witnessed the meeting, and, without waiting for a signal, were closing in on the pair, who stood still for a moment, then turned and walked straight toward the place where the two officers were crouching.

"Given into our hands," muttered Baker exultingly; then, as the newcomer stepped almost in front of him, he sprang forward, and seized him in no uncertain grip. "I've got you," he shouted in triumph.

The man straightened his bent shoulders to his full height; then stood passive.

"Well, well, so you have," said a quiet voice, "and what are you going to do about it?"

"A light here," roared Baker.

Obediently one of the soldiers who had come running up struck a match, and held it in the hol-

THE LOST DESPATCH

low of his hand so the wind would not extinguish it. As the tiny flame grew brighter, he raised the match, and the light fell full on the face of Baker's prisoner.

"Good God! The President!" gasped the colonel, and his hands fell nerveless by his side.

CHAPTER VII

THE MISCHANCES OF A NIGHT

BAKER glanced hopelessly about him; at the President, who pulled his old gray shawl closer around his shoulders to keep out the chill wind; at Lloyd, who stood clutching Nancy by her arms; and at the soldiers who stood grouped about them. For once his feelings were beyond expression.

"How long are you going to keep me here?" inquired Lincoln patiently. "And why did you jump at me like a Comanche Indian?"

"Not a mo-moment, sir," stuttered Baker. "It was this young lady we were after. We had no intention at all of interfering with you."

"And why do you want Miss Newton, Baker?" asked Lincoln.

"She is a rebel spy. We caught her signaling to-night."

"I deny it," exclaimed Nancy hotly; and she tried to step forward, but Lloyd's strong arm held her back.

THE LOST DESPATCH

"Mr. President, hear me just one moment." Lloyd spoke with great earnestness, and Lincoln turned to face him. One of the soldiers had found a half-burnt candle in his coat pocket, and by its feeble rays the President noticed Lloyd's detaining hand on Nancy's shoulder.

"Release Miss Newton," he ordered sternly. "Then tell your story in detail."

Reluctantly Lloyd did as he was told. "This young lady picked up a piece of paper in Gautier's which I knew contained valuable information. I have suspected her for some days of supplying the Confederates with our secrets; so I followed her here, and saw the signal light. Colonel Baker and I thought you came up the street in answer to it. It was too dark to recognize you . . ."

"So you took me for a rebel spy?"

"I certainly am sorry for my precipitancy, Mr. President," said Baker apologetically. "Thinking you were an accomplice of this lady's, I tried only to do my duty."

"My shoulder and arm can testify to your zeal," chuckled Lincoln. "Now, Miss Nancy, what have you to say to these charges?"

"I never picked up a paper, Mr. President," said Nancy firmly. "On my return home to-night from Gautier's I found a message from my old

THE MISCHANCES OF A NIGHT

mammy, Aunt Polly, saying she was very ill and that she needed me. She lives in that house with her son, who is the caretaker during Mr. Perry's absence. So I"

"Disguised yourself and came here," broke in Lloyd insultingly.

"If by 'disguise' you mean I changed my evening gown, I did—for this more suitable street dress." Nancy threw back her head haughtily. "I am offering my explanation to the President; not to you, sir."

"Continue your remarks, Miss Nancy," directed Lincoln quietly.

"Why, that is all, Mr. President. After changing my gown I came here"

"By side streets," again interposed Lloyd.

"By side streets, because the more direct route is crowded with noisy men and women," answered Nancy calmly. "I found Doctor Boyd here with Aunt Polly." Lloyd uttered another exclamation, but Nancy refused to pay heed. "He advised that we move Aunt Polly into a room facing south as it would be warmer and more cheery for her in the daytime. Jasper and the doctor carried her there, and I went ahead with the lamp"

"With which you have been signaling to the rebels," declared Lloyd roughly.

THE LOST DESPATCH

"I did nothing of the sort," retorted Nancy vehemently. "In trying to find a place to put the lamp down I walked backward and forward with it in my hand until I had pushed a table before the window. I then placed the lamp on it, and went to help the doctor. He told me my presence was no longer needed, and advised me to go home, as Aunt Metoaca would be alarmed by my long absence. Bidding Aunt Polly good night, I slipped out of the side entrance and ran into you at the gate, Mr. President."

"Miss Nancy told me then," volunteered Lincoln, slowly, "that she had been with Aunt Polly who was ill. I know Aunt Polly, too; we have frequent talks when I stroll down this street and she is working in the garden, or sweeping the driveway."

"And I will take my oath to the truth of Nancy's story," said Doctor Boyd, stepping into the circle about the President. "Aunt Polly had to undergo a minor operation, she insisted on Nancy being present, and to prevent the old woman working herself into a fever I sent for Nancy. I would have escorted her here myself, but my duties at the hospital prevented."

Lincoln nodded understandingly. "It's all right, Doctor," he said soothingly. "I believe

THE MISCHANCES OF A NIGHT

Miss Nancy, and I guess our friend, Colonel Baker, does, also."

Baker looked doubtfully at Nancy. "Yes," he muttered ungraciously, "Miss Newton has made everything clear." He turned to address Lloyd, but the latter had disappeared.

"Then suppose we walk on," said Lincoln. "It is cold standing here. Your aunt called to see me this morning, Miss Nancy."

"It was most kind of you to give us passes to Winchester." Nancy looked gratefully at the President as she tried to keep step with his long strides. "The change will do Aunt Metoaca good, she has been too long in Washington without a change of air, and I am worried about her condition."

Lloyd rejoined the little procession at the corner of New York Avenue and Seventeenth Street. To the right gleamed the lights of the cavalry corral on the ellipse back of the White House, and on the left were the buildings of the quartermaster general's depot. Lloyd drew Baker to one side and whispered:

"Apparently the girl has covered her tracks this time. Symonds and I entered the house and the darky, Jasper, and his mother repeated the same tale to me. We searched the house, but

THE LOST DESPATCH

could find nothing suspicious. On leaving I stationed a guard about the grounds, for I am convinced she *did* signal to some one who may try to enter the house later on."

"Better give it up," growled Baker, whose temper had been sorely tried by his own exploit.

"Never!" Lloyd's teeth came together with an ominous click. "I will trap that girl if it takes me months."

The President and Nancy led the way up Seventeenth Street to Pennsylvania Avenue and down that thoroughfare toward the White House. Lincoln stopped when he reached the entrance to the War Department.

"I am going in here to read the latest despatches," he said. "Good night, Doctor. Miss Nancy, when do you go to Winchester?"

"On the early train to-morrow, or, rather, this morning. Good night, Mr. President."

"Good night and a safe journey to you." The President watched Nancy and Doctor Boyd out of sight; then turned to Baker. "Don't take it to heart, man. I rather enjoyed your springing at me—it was a new sensation."

"Indeed, Mr. President, you should not go out at this time of night without a guard," remonstrated Baker earnestly. "Then such a thing

THE MISCHANCES OF A NIGHT

would never have happened. It is not safe for you to walk about without proper protection."

"Baker," said the President reminiscently, "you remind me of the little girl who had just been told of the omnipresence of God, and was so upset that she turned angrily upon her pet dog, saying: 'Go back in the house, Peggy. It's bad enough having God tagging 'round, without you.' Good night, Baker," and Lincoln disappeared inside the War Department.

CHAPTER VIII

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

SOME hours later Doctor Boyd stepped inside his hall and softly closed the front door. Quickly removing his hat and heavy cloak, he went directly into his back office and felt about in the dark for his match box. It was not to be found in its accustomed place, and an angry exclamation escaped the doctor. Apparently Martha Crane, his trusted old housekeeper, had taken advantage of his absence and tidied up his desk, an act of vandalism which always reduced Boyd to a state bordering on frenzy.

"Kin I help yo', suh?"

Doctor Boyd's right hand sought his hip pocket, and he faced in the direction from which the voice came. The intruder guessed his intention and spoke hastily.

"Fo' God's sake, doan shoot, suh. I'se Sam." And to confirm his statement he struck a match and held it so that his features were visible by the flickering flame.

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

"Well, come in and light this confounded burner," exclaimed the doctor testily, as his fingers slowly relaxed their hold on his weapon. "Next time don't announce your presence so dramatically, Sam, or you may get hurt."

"Yessir." The negro stepped with alacrity through the doorway which led to the front office, and applied his half burned match to the gas jet over the doctor's desk. "Miss Martha done told me ter wait in dar."

"Confound the woman!" The doctor seated himself in his armchair and contemplated the neatly arranged papers and ornaments on his desk in despair. "Where is she?"

"Done gone out," announced Sam briefly. "I tole her I'd be 'sponsible fo' de house 'til she cum back."

"Where were you to-night, Sam? Miss Nancy expected you to meet her at the Perrys'."

"I went dar, suh, but I seed a lot ob men a-hangin' 'roun' watchin' de place, so I jes' cum on heah, thinkin' p'raps Miss Nancy mite be wif yo.' I done got de papah she wanted."

"Miss Nancy leaves at nine o'clock for Winchester."

"Golly! Den I mus' git right 'roun' an' gib her dis heah papah." Sam started for the door.

THE LOST DESPATCH

"Stop!" commanded Boyd. "The Newtons' house is also watched by Secret Service agents. I saw them sneaking about the yard when I left Miss Nancy an hour ago. If you go there at this hour you will be arrested instantly."

Sam scratched his woolly head in perplexity. "I reckon if I jes' go to der back alley an' whistle fo' Misery dey won' notice dis ole nigger," he volunteered hopefully, after a moment's thought.

"What good would that do you?"

"I'll jes' slip de papah in de dawg's collah, an' he'll take it ter Missy same as he brings her messages ter me."

Boyd shook his head. "It is too much to risk on a dog's sagacity now that suspicion is directed toward Miss Nancy."

"Den 'spose I meet Missy at de train an' slip de papah in her han'."

"Unfortunately she is shadowed wherever she goes. Sit down a moment, Sam, and let me think." The doctor stroked his chin reflectively. "I'm afraid if I go to their house on the pretext of giving Miss Metoaca medicine I will be searched, and if that paper is incriminating we will all swing together. Here, let me read the message, and then I can repeat it to Miss Nancy at the station."

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

"No, suh, 'scuse me, suh, but dis heah papah was ter be delibered ter her pussionally."

"I am the best judge of that. Give me the paper at once."

"No, suh," reiterated Sam obstinately. "Cunnel Newton tole me I was ter do 'zackly what Miss Nancy oddered, 'kase he willed meh ter her fo' he died, an' I'se her serbent now same as I wore his body serbent."

"Confound your stupidity," growled Doctor Boyd. At that moment a sound from the basement reached his quick ear. Signing to Sam to remain where he was, Boyd tiptoed out into the hall and over to the back stairs. The kitchen door creaked dolefully as it was pushed open by an old woman who walked heavily along the lower hall toward the stairs carrying a lighted candle. The doctor drew a sigh of relief.

"Glad you have returned, Martha," he called softly. "Please bring some ice water into my office on your way to bed."

Sam was plucking nervously at his old hat when the doctor reëntered the office.

"'Tain't 'kase I doan *want* ter gib yo' dat papah, suh," he began confusedly, edging toward the open hall door. "But de cunnel, he brunged meh up ter obey his odders, same as he done Miss

THE LOST DESPATCH

Nancy. His word wore law to eb'ry one on de plantashun. I reckon I'se jes' got ter fin' some way ob reachin' Miss Nancy."

"You won't have to reach far," volunteered a familiar voice from the doorway. Sam wheeled about and a gasp escaped him.

"You? Nancy!" The doctor gazed incredulously at the stooping, gray-haired woman who hobbled into the room and closed the door.

For answer Nancy straightened her bent shoulders and removed the gray wig.

"I found Martha Crane with Aunt Metoaca," she explained, seating herself by the desk. "She told me that you were here, Sam, and having failed to meet you at the Perrys' I decided to try and catch you here before you left."

"But where on earth did you get that disguise?" demanded the doctor.

"I borrowed the clothes from Martha; fortunately, with padding, they fit me quite well. She also lent me the key of your basement so that I would not attract attention by going to the front door. The wig," Nancy laughed, "I used that in some tableaux at one of the Sanitary Fairs last year. It came in very handy, for the Secret Service men thought I was old Martha and let me pass unquestioned."

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

"No wonder; your make-up is perfect," declared Boyd heartily.

"Have you secured the paper for me, Sam?" asked Nancy.

"Yes, Missy." Sam took a small slip of paper from an inside pocket and handed it to her. Nancy studied the closely written lines intently.

"Important?" inquired the doctor, breaking the long silence.

"Very." She carefully refolded the slip. "This contains the key to Stanton's private cipher code."

A low whistle of surprise escaped Boyd. "How did you get it?"

"Arthur Shriver, who, as you know, was a clerk in his office, copied it, but before he could get it to me he was arrested on suspicion," explained Nancy. "I heard he was confined in one of the front rooms in the Old Capitol Prison, and so arranged to have the sentry's attention diverted while I questioned Arthur by prearranged signals."

"Did the plan work?"

"It did. Arthur told me where he had hidden the paper, and I sent Sam to-night to get it for me."

"Well, well!" The doctor sat back and con-

THE LOST DESPATCH

templated Nancy admiringly. "There's another message written on the back of that paper."

Nancy turned it over and her eyes widened in surprise as she read aloud the hastily scrawled words: "Mrs. Bennett is a Union spy. I have just overheard an interview between her and Stanton."

"That woman!" ejaculated the doctor. "That cat!"

"Felines scratch," Nancy shrugged her shoulders disdainfully. "Stanton is fighting the devil with fire."

"Be careful, Nancy; don't undervalue your opponents," cautioned the doctor.

"I flatter myself I am a match for Mrs. Bennett," retorted Nancy, "and forewarned is forearmed."

"Strange," muttered Doctor Boyd. "Very strange. Do you recollect the——"

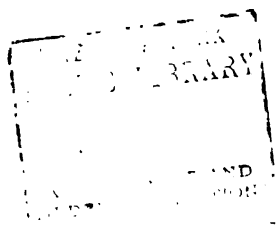
"I shall turn this paper over to you, Doctor," broke in Nancy impetuously, "to take through the lines, along with a despatch which I also secured to-night."

Boyd shook his head. "Impossible. I cannot leave the city now."

"Why not?"



“‘You? Nancy!’ The doctor gazed incredulously.”



A VOICE FROM THE PAST

"Because I have a capital operation to perform at ten o'clock."

Nancy gazed at him in consternation. "Why, Doctor, you have always said that when the Cause needed your services you would not fail . . ."

"Nor will I, when the Cause *really* needs me. But at present you are better equipped to carry these messages through the lines than I."

Nancy fingered the table ornaments for a moment in silence; then raised her troubled eyes to her listener's face.

"I have sent my last despatch," she announced quietly.

"What!" The doctor could not believe his ears. "Why?"

"Because I refuse to deceive people any longer. I was brought up to believe a lie an abomination of the Lord—and I have been a living lie for three long years!"

"You have developed a New England conscience," growled Boyd.

"Do you think all the virtues belong north of Mason and Dixon's line?" retorted Nancy hotly. "For shame!"

"I beg your pardon," the old surgeon bowed toward her with stately courtesy. "Do be reasonable, child. This operation I am to perform

THE LOST DESPATCH

means not only life to the patient, but much to science. Besides, I doubt if the authorities would allow me to leave Washington to-day. Now, your plans for leaving the city are already made; therefore it will be a very simple, easy matter for you to carry those papers into Virginia. You will run little risk"

"I am not hesitating on that score," broke in Nancy. "I would give my life gladly for the 'bonnie blue flag'—*in the open*. It is the under-hand methods—the spying—the deceit—that burn like a red-hot coal." Nancy paused; then continued more quietly: "There is such a word as '*honor*'." She drew out another slip of paper from the bosom of her dress and tossed it, together with the paper already in her hand, on the table. "You must find another messenger."

"Missy, Missy, what yo' talkin' 'bout?" Nancy and the doctor both started. They had forgotten Sam's presence. "Is yo' goin' back on yo' gibben word—yo'—a Newton?"

The girl's face whitened. She started to speak, but the negro gave her no opportunity to do so.

"Has yo' done forgot dat Sunday night?" he asked, leaning forward across the table in his earnestness. "Dat night when I fotched yo' from Newton Manor to Massa's bedside?" His voice

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

deepened, the musical voice of the emotional African.

In Nancy's mind distinct and vivid rose the memory of that wild ride through the night to her father, the gay, handsome father whom she idolized. Then, in thought, she again knelt beside the rude bed in the silent tent, clinging to a feeble hand which had not the strength to return her pressure.

"Missy," Sam's voice brought her back to the present, "Massa done brunged yo' up ter ride, an' shoot, an' swim 'kase he wanted a boy so bad. He wore shot leadin' a charge ag'in de Yanks, an' when de gen'ral cum later ter say how bad he feel ter lose Massa, he jes' said: 'Ah wish Ah haid uh son ter take ma place in de ranks.'" The negro paused, then continued slowly: "When yo' an' I got dar, Missy, de Massa wore mos' gone, but he say ter yo': 'Doan cry, dear, de fightin' Newtons allus die wid de boots on—an' so die happy.' An' den he raise hissef up uh li'le an' gasp: 'Ah gib yo' ter de Cause—swear to uphold de honoh ob Virginny—ter repel invasion—swear——'" Sam raised his right hand solemnly. "An' yo' swore dat oath on de Crucifix, Missy, on de Crucifix—in a dyin' man's han'."

THE LOST DESPATCH

Sam's accusing eyes held Nancy spellbound. Mechanically she readjusted her wig. Quickly her right hand sought the papers lying on the table, and before either of the men realized her intention she had slipped from the room and was gone.

CHAPTER IX

OUTWITTED

FOR once Lloyd had overslept, and he kicked a chair viciously out of his way as he stooped to find an elusive collar button. A loud knock at his door interrupted his search. On opening it he found one of the chambermaids leaning against the opposite wall.

"Well, what is it?" he demanded sharply.

"Dis hyar gen'man's down to de do' an' wants ter see yo' to onst," and she thrust a card into his hand.

"Tell Colonel Mitchell I will be down in a minute. No, stay—show him up here." Lloyd retreated into his room. He had just completed his toilet when a second knock sounded on his door.

"Good morning, Mitchell," he said cordially, admitting the officer. "I had you come up here because we can be more private. Sit down and have a cigar," and he pulled forward a chair; then opened his cigar case.

THE LOST DESPATCH

But the colonel remained standing, and waved aside the proffered cigar. "Did you catch Miss Newton?" he asked eagerly.

"We found her, yes; but my plan missed fire."

"You mean?"

"She did not try to communicate with the rebels last night."

"Then you did not arrest her as a spy?"

"No—I had not sufficient evidence against her to do so."

"Is she at large?"

"Yes; but closely watched."

"Did you take the despatch from her?"

"No."

"She still has it?"

"I suppose so. Good God! man, what's the matter?"

Mitchell, white faced and trembling, collapsed into a chair.

"Pull yourself together," continued Lloyd sternly. "She cannot do any harm even if she does manage to send that despatch to Lee; it is false information."

Twice Mitchell tried to speak. "Man, man," he gasped finally. "By some fearful mischance I dropped a real despatch and not the bogus one."

With eyes starting from his head, Lloyd re-

OUTWITTED

garded the unfortunate officer while he slowly digested his startling news. Then he picked up his overcoat and hat and made for the closed door. "To think I let that girl go into Virginia under the President's pass with that despatch in her pocket. Damnation!" and the door slammed violently on his retreating figure.

Goddard rose bright and early that morning. He did not awaken Lloyd, for he had bidden him good-bye the night before, so after scrawling a few lines to his friend thanking him for his hospitality and leaving the note on the bureau, he hastened down to the Newtons'. Nancy and her aunt did not keep him waiting long, and with the help of their butler he got them into the waiting hack, tossed in their numerous hand luggage, and jumped up by the driver. On their arrival at the depot he found they had but three minutes in which to catch the train, so he unceremoniously bundled Miss Metoaca and Nancy through the gates and to the train; while the hackman brought up the rear with two carpet bags and a lunch hamper.

They found they had the car practically to themselves, so Miss Metoaca picked out the cleanest seat, and insisted that all the luggage be put by her side where it would be directly under her

THE LOST DESPATCH

eye. Then she announced she was going to take "forty winks," as she had been up most of the night and needed sleep. With a sigh of satisfaction, Goddard settled himself next to Nancy in the seat directly across the aisle from Miss Metoaca. As the train pulled out from the depot a man swung himself aboard the back platform and slipped into a seat in the rear of the last car unseen by Goddard.

"You look tired," said Goddard, glancing keenly at Nancy's pale face.

"I am; for I spent most of the night with a sick servant. But you, Major Goddard, don't look any too fresh yourself," replied Nancy quickly.

It was true. Goddard had spent a sleepless night. He could not believe—would not believe Lloyd's charge against Nancy. After all, she was not the only girl, or woman, with red-gold hair in the world. Lloyd had nothing to go upon but theories—no absolute proof—and an innocent act might easily be construed into a guilty one by a suspicious mind. Perhaps Lloyd's wish had proved father to the thought; he showed extraordinary animosity toward Nancy. All the chivalry of his nature revolted at the Secret Service officer's cold-blooded scheme to ensnare her, and

OUTWITTED

Goddard determined in his own mind she should have fair play.

"Are you a Washingtonian by birth, Miss Newton?" he inquired, as she moved restlessly under his intent gaze.

"No, by adoption. I was born and raised in Richmond. I do not remember my mother. She died when I was very young. After my father's death I came north in charge of my black mammy, Aunt Polly, to live with Aunt Metoaca. My dear father," Nancy's eyes filled with unbidden tears, and she hastily tried to wink them away. "I wish you could have known each other, Major. Dad's courtly greeting and warm heart won him so many, many friends."

"I second the wish," said Goddard gently. "Pardon the question, but has he been dead long?"

"Three years now; but time has not lessened my sorrow. We were all in all to each other, notwithstanding I was his greatest disappointment."

"How so?"

"He wanted a son and heir; but I was his only child, the last of a long line of fighting men. Dad was my constant companion as well as my teacher," she sighed involuntarily. "I miss him more and more as the years go on."

THE LOST DESPATCH

Goddard nodded sympathetically. "Oh, for the touch of a vanished hand, and the sound of a voice that is still," he quoted softly. Nancy started, and, as her lips quivered, Goddard added more lightly, "I have a fellow feeling with you, for I am an orphan, too, Miss Nancy; but I cannot say I had so agreeable a guardian as you have."

"Aunt Metoaca has been both mother and father to me. Bless her dear kind heart!" and Nancy glanced with deep affection at the nodding gray head on the opposite seat. "She and Doctor John Boyd are the only friends I have."

"Oh, come, you know you have legions of . . ."

"Of acquaintances—yes," interpolated Nancy swiftly. "It is my fault. I do not make friends easily, and lately . . ."

"Yes, and lately?" asked Goddard, as she hesitated.

"I have noticed a change in my acquaintances. Oh, nothing tangible; but there is a coolness in their greeting, and I hear innuendoes."

"What do you care? Women will say anything when jealous, which I suspect is the cause of their behavior. Hasn't your mirror told you that?" and Goddard smiled, as he looked with admiration at her winsome face.

OUTWITTED

"It is not always the women who throw the first stone, Major," again Nancy hesitated. "There is a man in Washington—he chose to consider himself in love with me, and because I did not encourage his suit he—he—insinuates——"

"The beast! Why don't you tell him he is a liar and a coward?"

"Because I am only a woman."

"I wish you would give me the right to protect you," whispered Goddard, carried away by the wistful appeal in her large, eloquent eyes.

"Major Goddard," Nancy drew back, frightened by the intensity of his manner. "This is very wrong. You—you—forget we have not known each other long."

"I am getting on as fast as I can," retorted Goddard sturdily; his heart thumping as he saw her confusion. "Miss Newton—Nancy—I mean every word I have said. Tell me that scoundrel's name!"

Unconsciously Goddard raised his voice, and Miss Metoaca awoke from her slumbers, which had long exceeded the "forty winks." That limit existed only in her imagination.

"Well, young people, are you hungry?" to attract Goddard's attention she prodded him with

THE LOST DESPATCH

her umbrella. "Suppose we open our lunch basket."

Reluctantly Goddard rose and assisted Miss Metoaca in handing the sandwiches, cakes, and cold coffee to Nancy. They did full justice to the good things provided by Miss Metoaca's excellent cook, and lingered over the improvised lunch table. Finally Nancy commenced putting the remains of the lunch into the hamper just as the train reached the railroad bridge which spanned the Potomac at the juncture of the Shenandoah River.

As the train came to a stop before the depot at Harper's Ferry their car was surrounded by a squad of soldiers, and a lieutenant of infantry swung on board the forward platform and consulted with the conductor.

"There's the party," said the latter, pointing through the open door to Miss Metoaca and Nancy, who were sitting together. The officer stepped into the car and addressed them.

"Miss Newton?" he asked, touching his cap, "and Miss Nancy Newton, from Washington?"

"Yes, sir," said Miss Metoaca. "What then?"

"I have orders to detain you both in Harper's Ferry. Kindly follow me," and he turned as if to leave the car.

OUTWITTED

"By whose order, and under what charge?" asked Goddard hotly, stepping in front of the two indignant women.

"Are you Major Goddard, of the —th United States cavalry?" demanded the younger officer.

"I am."

"General Stevenson received orders by telegraph from Washington to detain these ladies here on their arrival. I do not know the charge, Major," replied the lieutenant courteously.

"How long do you propose keeping us here?" asked Nancy, slowly recovering from her astonishment.

"Until further orders are received from Washington."

"I haven't the faintest intention of staying here," announced Miss Metoaca, with rising indignation. "We have passes from President Lincoln to go to Winchester, and to Winchester I am going."

The lieutenant shook his head. "These orders supersede your passes. You will both have to come with me."

"Indeed?" Miss Metoaca settled herself comfortably in her seat. "Then, young man, you will have the pleasure of carrying me; for I do not

THE LOST DESPATCH

intend to walk out of this car until I reach my proper destination."

The lieutenant was equal to the occasion. "Go forward, conductor," he ordered, "and tell the engineer to back this car on a siding in the yard, then uncouple it from the train. Sergeant, conduct these passengers," indicating the men who had gathered about them, "into the next car."

"Wait," called Nancy, and the conductor stopped. "I am sure this extraordinary order can be satisfactorily explained; so let us go quietly with this officer, Aunt Metoaca. We must be dignified under our arrest."

"Dignity? Who cares about dignity when one's personal liberty is in question? I decline to leave this seat."

Nancy bent and whispered rapidly in her aunt's ear. At first her communication was not taken in good part; then the spinster's face cleared, and she rose.

"I will come with you," she volunteered graciously. "Go on ahead, Lieutenant."

Bewildered by her sudden change of front, the young officer led the way to the door, followed by both women, Goddard, and the sergeant. As Miss Metoaca stepped from the car the guard closed round them. The conductor deposited

OUTWITTED

their hand luggage on the platform. "All aboard!" he shouted; then signaled to his engineer, and with a rattle and roar the belated train thundered out of the station.

"Where do you propose taking these ladies?" demanded Goddard.

"To the waiting room. They are to be detained here under guard until an officer arrives from Washington on a special train to examine them."

"Do you know who this officer is?"

"Captain Lloyd, of the Secret Service. In there, ladies." He opened the door of the empty waiting room, and with flashing eyes and heightened color Miss Metoaca and Nancy disappeared inside the door. Goddard started to follow them, but the lieutenant laid a detaining hand on his arm as he closed the door. "Will you come with me, Major. I have orders not to allow you to hold communication with the ladies."

Goddard stopped as if shot and glared at the embarrassed officer. The silent passenger, who had carefully remained in the background during the scene in the car, was following the two men, intent on listening to their conversation, and he bumped into Goddard when he stopped so

THE LOST DESPATCH

abruptly. Goddard instantly turned and collared him.

"What the devil!" giving vent to his rage. "Why, Symonds," releasing the Secret Service agent. "What brings you here?"

"Captain Lloyd's orders, sir," and Symonds saluted respectfully.

CHAPTER X

THE FORTUNES OF WAR

IT was dreary waiting in the stuffy room. Miss Metoaca, who had resigned herself to the inevitable after her recent explosion, was busy knitting a talma, a round cape which, like Penelope's web, seemed to the uninitiated to have no beginning and no end. She always carried it with her in a voluminous pocket as she hated to be idle. Nancy, busy with her own thoughts, sat gazing abstractedly at the dingy wall. The tread of the sentries could be distinctly heard as they tramped back and forth before the windows and door. The sergeant and Symonds sat by the entrance, watching their prisoners closely. The piercing shriek of a locomotive broke the stillness, and soon with a grinding of brakes the special train came to a standstill in front of the depot. Symonds and Lieutenant Field, of the Provost Guard, met Lloyd as he jumped to the platform.

THE LOST DESPATCH

"Miss Newton and her niece are in the waiting room, Captain Lloyd," reported the lieutenant, "under guard. Their luggage is in the station master's room awaiting your inspection."

"Good!" Lloyd's tone of satisfaction made Goddard's blood boil. Lloyd turned to his silent friend, and held out his hand. "How are you, Bob?"

Goddard ignored the outstretched hand and the cordial greeting.

"What do you mean by this high-handed outrage, Captain Lloyd?" he demanded bitterly.

Lloyd's eyes flashed. "Do not stretch my friendship too far, Bob. Your apparent infatuation for that rebel 'spy'"—Goddard winced perceptibly, and his color heightened—"blinds your judgment. I give you fair warning, sir, that if you interfere in any way in this affair you will be placed in close arrest."

Without a word Goddard turned on his heel and walked to the further end of the platform. Lloyd returned to the car, and joined two women who stood waiting patiently by its side.

"This way, Miss Watt," and followed by both women he led the way to the waiting room. Lieutenant Field threw open the door.

"Captain Lloyd," he announced.

THE FORTUNES OF WAR

Miss Metoaca's busy fingers stopped and she surveyed the newcomer from head to foot, but Nancy never turned in his direction.

"What do you want?" inquired Miss Metoaca, seeing that neither of them spoke.

"The copy of the despatch from the adjutant general's office dropped by Colonel Mitchell last night."

"Haven't such a thing. Wouldn't know it if I saw it," snapped Miss Metoaca.

"Symonds, you and the sergeant can step outside." Lloyd waited until they were well out of hearing. "Miss Newton," turning directly to Nancy, "you and I have met before."

Nancy raised her head and glanced closely at him. "Oh, yes," she said. "I believe I have seen you once or twice."

"Twice?" Lloyd laughed. "I have a better memory than you. How about the 27th of December?"

Nancy looked at him in genuine surprise. "You speak in riddles," she said disdainfully.

"I think you can solve this one," he touched the scar on his temple. "The blow from your revolver kept me in the hospital for some time."

"Is the man crazy?" Miss Metoaca straight-

THE LOST DESPATCH

ened indignantly in her chair. "My niece does not go around knocking men on the head, though she has broken some hearts."

"Come, Miss Newton, evasion will not help you," said Lloyd impatiently, paying no attention to Miss Metoaca's remark. "I know you are a rebel spy . . ."

"Do you know the meaning of the word 'spy'?" inquired Nancy hotly.

"Perfectly," briefly. "I have wasted quite enough time. Give me that despatch!"

"What despatch?"

Lloyd lost all patience. "Once for all, do you intend to give me that despatch, or not?"

Nancy shrugged her shoulders. "It is impossible to give what we do not possess."

Lloyd strode to the door and beckoned to the two women standing in the hall.

"Search these ladies," he directed, pointing to Miss Metoaca and Nancy, "and see that you search them thoroughly. I am positive the older lady is padded." Miss Metoaca's face was a study. "If they give you any trouble I will send in a guard to assist you," and with this parting threat he walked out of the room and banged the door to behind him.

"Don't you lay a finger on me," ordered Miss

THE FORTUNES OF WAR

Metoaca belligerently. "If you do I will box your ears!"

"What good would that do you?" asked Miss Watt practically. "I guess you would rather have me than one of the men undress you. Do be reasonable."

"Yes, Aunt Metoaca, let us get it over and done with." Nancy's face was white, and she looked with frightened eyes at the two women. "President Lincoln shall hear of this outrage."

"He shall!" Miss Metoaca's tone spoke volumes as she reluctantly began undressing.

Defly the women detectives went about their work. Nothing escaped their notice. Garments were held up to the light to see if anything lay concealed in the linings, some were ripped open; their shoes were examined with care. Nothing was discovered.

"I hope you are satisfied," snapped Miss Metoaca, hot in spirit, but decidedly cold physically. "I do not enjoy impersonating Eve. Give me those underclothes at once!"

Miss Watt handed her the necessary articles. "Take down your hair," she directed.

Miss Metoaca stopped dressing, one stocking suspended in air.

THE LOST DESPATCH

"What?" she exclaimed indignantly. "Is nothing above suspicion?" She whirled around and saw the other detective cutting open a pincushion. "Mercy sakes, what do you think you will find in that?"

"Quinine," answered the woman curtly. But her search was not rewarded, and she threw the useless pincushion on the floor.

Without a word Nancy let down her hair. It fell in profusion over her shoulders and down her back. Quickly the detective ran her fingers over the girl's head. Without further ado Miss Watt did the same with Miss Metoaca's scant gray locks.

"You can put on your clothes," she said, more kindly, and with skillful fingers she assisted Miss Metoaca into her dress, and helped her arrange her hair.

"Well!" Miss Metoaca drew a long breath. "I have been through a good deal in my life, but I reckon this beats creation. I look like a scarecrow! Nancy, are you ready? Yes. Then, perhaps, Miss Watt, you will be good enough to inform that apology for a gentleman, Captain Lloyd, that I would like to see him."

Lloyd came at once in answer to the detective's call. His face fell when she declared nothing

THE FORTUNES OF WAR

had been found of a suspicious nature, and no trace of the missing despatch.

"Do you mean to say Miss Metoaca Newton was not padded?" he asked incredulously.

"No, sir," Miss Watt hesitated. A slow smile passed over her sharp face. "That is just natural development," she added.

Nancy turned and addressed Lloyd. "This farce is played out. I demand our instant release from this humiliating situation."

Lloyd pondered for a moment. His thorough search of their luggage had revealed nothing compromising. Apparently the Newtons were innocent. He had no authority to keep them under arrest unless he had found positive evidence of their guilt. He thought over the situation quickly, and came to a sudden decision.

"If I have put you to annoyance, it was but in the line of duty," he said gravely. "Accept my apologies, ladies."

"Seems to me they come a little late in the day," retorted Miss Metoaca, struggling into her wrap. "Are we at liberty to go to a hotel, if there is such a thing near this depot?"

"I am going on to Winchester, and will take you both there in my special car." Lloyd led the way to the platform. "Miss Watt, a train leaves

THE LOST DESPATCH

for Washington in half an hour which you and your companion can take. On your arrival report at once to Colonel Baker."

They found Goddard waiting at the steps of the car.

"I hope you suffered no indignities, Miss Meto-aca," he asked, assisting her up the high steps; then, without waiting for an answer, he turned eagerly to Nancy, who colored hotly as she placed her hand for one second in his before entering the car.

CHAPTER XI

WHO LAUGHS LAST

THE trip to Winchester was uneventful. The country through which they passed had been made desolate by the contending armies; and Nancy gazed sad-eyed at the ruined homes and wasted fields. War, grim war, had devastated the entire valley.

Miss Metoaca spent most of her time repairing the rents made in her wardrobe by Miss Watt and her assistant, and she ignored Lloyd's existence with studied insolence. Goddard tried to engage Nancy in a low-toned conversation, but she did not respond to his overtures; so, tired and worried over the whole situation, he went to the farther end of the car and found what comfort he could with a cigar.

The station master and regular detail of soldiers were at Stephenson's Depot when the special train reached its destination. On inquiry Goddard learned from the officer in command of the detachment that the usual escort had come from

THE LOST DESPATCH

Winchester for the mail and supplies brought by the regular train, which had arrived several hours ahead of them.

"Captain Gurley was very much excited when the conductor told him the Misses Newton, whom he had come to meet, were detained at Harper's Ferry," continued the officer. "He had to return to Winchester. He said he would ride back here, or send an escort for you if he learned by wire to Harper's Ferry that the ladies would reach here to-night."

"Is there any conveyance I can get to take these ladies over to Winchester?" inquired Goddard.

"Ole Miss Page sent her mules an' road wagon," volunteered the station master, "for them. Captain Gurley left your hoss hitched under the shed across the street, Major, thinkin' if you came through sooner than he could get back you'd want him. I reckon you'll find Miss Page's worthless nigger boy asleep in the shed, too, 'cause I tole him he couldn't loaf 'round here."

"I will stay with the ladies, Bob," said Lloyd. "You and Symonds go for your horse and the mules."

Goddard turned over an empty crate. "Better sit on this, Miss Metoaca," he advised, noting the

WHO LAUGHS LAST

lines of fatigue in the spinster's haggard face. "There is room for you, too, Miss Nancy. Symonds, come with me," and the two men hastened across the road to the tumbled down shed.

Goddard's mare, Brown Betty, welcomed him with a whinny of delight, and he stopped a moment to caress her. The mules, harnessed to an open two-seated wagon, were hitched beside his horse, but there was no sign of the negro driver.

"You will have to drive them, Symonds," said Goddard, pulling the blanket off his mare, and tightening the saddle girths. "Here, Sergeant," as that worthy approached, "help back these mules out into the street."

It took some moments to induce the mules to move at all, but by dint of much whipping and shouting the animals were finally made to mind. Once out of the shed, Symonds had no difficulty in driving up to the depot, where Goddard soon joined him, leading his horse.

"The darky has disappeared," he explained briefly to Miss Metoaca, as he helped her and Nancy into the back seat and covered them with the warm laprobes that were in the bottom of the wagon.

"Captain Lloyd," Miss Metoaca leaned forward with the inborn breeding inherited from

THE LOST DESPATCH

generations of gentle blood, "you appear to have no way of reaching Winchester except by foot. May I offer you the fourth seat in this wagon?"

Lloyd colored as he raised his hat. "Thank you, madam." He caught Nancy's mocking smile, and murmured: "Is it to be an armed truce?"

"Why look on me as an enemy?" she retorted calmly.

Without answering, Lloyd seated himself by Symonds, and they started slowly off. Goddard stayed a moment to exchange a few more words with the officer stationed at the depot, then put spurs to his mare, and soon overtook the rest of his party.

The winter day was drawing to a close, and dusk was falling as they left the last cluster of houses behind them. The mules were old and poorly fed. It was impossible to get them to move faster than a jog-trot. They had gone some distance when Goddard saw a small detachment of cavalry approaching, leisurely walking their horses along the road from Winchester. Their blue uniforms reassured him, and he rode forward to meet the sergeant, and recognized on nearer view the insignia of his corps on the latter's uniform.

"Did Captain Gurley send you to escort these

WHO LAUGHS LAST

ladies?" he asked, as the sergeant spurred up and saluted.

"Yes, Major."

Goddard turned and beckoned to Symonds, who had stopped some yards in the rear. "What do you mean by letting your men straggle so along the road?" he demanded sharply. "Have them close up."

The sergeant again saluted, and wheeled his horse just behind Goddard's. "Close up, men!" he ordered. "Close up!"

Obediently the cavalymen trotted to their places on either side of the wagon, and Symonds urged his mules to their utmost speed to keep up with the escort.

"How far are we from Winchester, Bob?" called Lloyd.

"About . . ." Goddard's words died in his throat as a strong hand seized his bridle rein, and he looked into the barrel of the sergeant's army revolver. Swiftly his right hand sought his own revolver, and he fired from his hip, but the sudden rearing of his startled mare spoiled his aim. The next instant his weapon was wrenched from him by a trooper who had dashed to the sergeant's assistance, and his arms were pinioned behind his back. At the same moment Lloyd and

THE LOST DESPATCH

Symonds were covered by the revolvers of the cavalrymen on either side of the wagon.

"Resistance is useless," called the sergeant. "Stop those mules!"

His orders were instantly obeyed. Lloyd, realizing that he was helpless, sank back into his seat.

"Who the —— are you?" roared Goddard, as the men, with no gentle hand, searched him for other weapons.

"Willard Tucker, Captain, C. S. A., now serving with Colonel Mosby," was the quiet reply. "We were reconnoitring when we met your party, Major, and you obligingly asked us to 'close up.' "

Goddard inwardly cursed his own stupidity. He remembered, too late, that it was a favorite trick of Mosby's guerillas to disguise themselves in Federal uniforms and raid the mail and supply trains.

"Where are you taking us?" he inquired as, obedient to an order from Captain Tucker, the squad wheeled to the left at the fork of the roads.

"To Mosby," was the brief response. "Your name and regiment, and the names of your companions, Major?"

Goddard quickly supplied the desired information, and Tucker rode up to the wagon. "I am

WHO LAUGHS LAST

sorry to inconvenience you, ladies," he said, "but I must take you with me to headquarters."

Miss Metoaca and Nancy had sat spellbound watching Goddard's capture with startled eyes.

"Very well," said Miss Metoaca, with resignation, drawing a long breath. "Apparently it is as difficult for me to get to Winchester as it is for our troops to enter Richmond."

Tucker laughed as he leaned forward and addressed Symonds.

"If you try to drive anywhere but in the direction I tell you you will be instantly shot; and you, too, Captain Lloyd," he added sternly.

Symonds nodded glumly. Both he and Lloyd had been searched and their revolvers taken from them. Escape just then appeared to be out of the question. They were but three men against twenty guerillas. It was impossible to make the old mules go faster than a jog-trot; while the rebels were well mounted. Goddard, with his arms bound behind him, rode with a trooper on either side, each holding one of his reins.

After about an hour's ride over a rough road, that was really nothing more than a cow path, they turned to the east until they reached a creek.

Tucker shouted an order to his men, then turned to Miss Metoaca.

THE LOST DESPATCH

"We will bivouac in the woods yonder, near this ford," he said courteously. "It is impossible for us to reach Mosby to-night."

The rough and ready camp was soon organized, and a special shelter was arranged for Miss Metoaca and Nancy on the extreme left of the camp fire. They had watched the preparations with interest and, glad of the warmth of the fire, sat as near it as they conveniently could while a hasty meal was being cooked.

From the first moment of their capture Lloyd had watched Nancy like a lynx. Not a movement of her hands had escaped him. Had she planned their capture? If so, she would be sure to betray herself by some overt act or word. What treatment would Tucker accord her? Would he consider her a prisoner of war, or—a friend? They had met as strangers. Lloyd gave his parole so that he might keep Nancy under constant surveillance.

While these thoughts were occupying Lloyd Goddard was busy puzzling his brain for a way to escape. He might chance a dash for the open later on. Brown Betty was picketed near him, but there were Miss Metoaca and Nancy to be considered. He could not desert them. No plan seemed feasible; he would have to bide his time,

WHO LAUGHS LAST

and see what the fortunes of war would bring forth. He had just reached this conclusion when Captain Tucker approached him.

"If you will give me your parole not to attempt escape," he said, "I will have your arms freed."

Goddard thought quickly. "I promise—until to-morrow morning," he agreed reluctantly.

Tucker called one of the guerillas, and with his assistance released Goddard, who rubbed his stiff arms until the blood again circulated freely.

"Come over by the fire and have some supper," suggested the rebel captain, and with a muttered word of thanks Goddard hastened to join his friends. Nancy made room for him beside her.

"Don't be so down-hearted," she whispered, handing him a piece of corn-pone. "Our fate might be worse. I feel sure we will escape somehow."

"You are a brave girl to take it that way," he answered, and his eyes kindled with admiration. "I wonder how many men would have gone through this morning's humiliating experience and to-night's capture with such pluck."

Nancy laughed softly. "It is well you judge me from the exterior. I assure you I am 'all av a trimble,' and my heart quakes with fear of what

THE LOST DESPATCH

the future may have in store for me," and she glanced anxiously at the rough men about her.

"Miss Newton, won't you sing for us?" called Captain Tucker across the camp fire. "It is not often we capture ladies, and I am longing for the sound of a woman's voice."

"Do," pleaded Goddard, low in Nancy's ear.

She hesitated before answering; then: "Certainly, Captain Tucker, provided you will sing first."

"Agreed." Tucker cleared his throat, thought a moment, then began:

'Tis years since last we met,
And we may not meet again,
I have struggled to forget,
But the struggle was in vain.
For her voice lives on the breeze,
And her spirit comes at will;
In the midnight, on the seas,
Her bright smile haunts me still!

Dropping their various occupations the guerillas drew in about the camp fire as the familiar words of the famous rebel song reached them. Few joined in the chorus; they were busy thinking of their sweethearts and wives far away. Tucker glanced appealingly at Nancy as he began the next verse, but her face was averted.

WHO LAUGHS LAST

I have sailed 'neath alien skies,
I have trod the desert path,
I have seen the storm arise
Like a giant in his wrath;
Every danger I have known,
That a reckless life can fill;
Yet her presence has not flown,
Her bright smile haunts me still!

A round of applause rang out as Tucker's rich tenor voice ceased.

"Be quiet, you fellows," he directed. "Now, Miss Newton, I hold you to your promise."

Nancy looked about her. The fire had not been replenished, and the darkness was creeping in. It was difficult to clearly distinguish each man's face by the flickering light from the hot embers, but Goddard's expression caught her attention. Her woman's intuition read, and read aright, what he but dimly realized.

A burning blush dyed Nancy's pale cheeks, and for a moment her heart beat more rapidly; then sank. She was a rebel—a spy; he a—ah, not hated—Yankee—a gallant, *honorable* foe. She must not encourage him. That should not be charged against her when the reckoning came. The old words, "he who breaks—pays," recurred to her. Let hers be the pain, not his. She for-

THE LOST DESPATCH

got "My Old Kentucky Home," instead came the words:

Take back the heart that thou gavest,
What is my anguish to thee?
Take back the freedom thou cravest,
Leaving the fetters to me.
Take back the vows thou hast spoken,
Fling them aside and be free.

Her eyes caught and held Goddard's. Would he understand?

Smile o'er each pitiful token,
Leaving the sorrow for me;
Drink deep of life's fond illusion,
Gaze on the storm-cloud and flee
Swiftly, through strife and confusion,
Leaving the burden to me.

Not a man stirred as her glorious voice died away. Goddard's eyes fell, and he prodded the ground viciously with nervous fingers. His mouth was set in stubborn lines. No one spoke. Goddard roused himself. One quick compelling look at Nancy and his fine baritone voice took up the song she had left unfinished:

Then when at last, overtaken,
Time flings its fetters o'er thee,
Come, with a trust still unshaken,

WHO LAUGHS LAST

Come back a captive to me.
Come back in sadness or sorrow,
Once more my darling to be,

Come as of old, love, to borrow
Glimpses of sunlight from me.
Love shall resume her dominion,
Striving no more to be free,
When on her world-weary pinion,
Flies back my lost love to me.

"Good, Major, good," exclaimed Tucker heartily, as the applause rang out. "Do sing again, Miss Newton?"

Miss Metoaca answered for Nancy. "Not tonight, Captain Tucker. We have had a trying day and are completely worn out. With your permission we will go to our tent."

"Of course, Miss Newton," exclaimed Tucker, springing to his feet. "You and your niece are at liberty to walk about the camp, provided you do not approach the picket line."

"Thanks," Miss Metoaca's tone was dry. "Coming, Nancy? Good night, gentlemen," and she stalked to her temporary shelter with as much dignity as the uneven ground permitted.

Nancy rose, bade Tucker a courteous good night and, accompanied by Goddard, followed her aunt.

THE LOST DESPATCH

"Good night, Major," she said, and turned to enter the canvas shelter.

Goddard took her half extended hand in both of his.

"One moment," he implored, in so low a tone that she barely heard the words. "Did you intend that song to have an especial meaning for me? *Did you?*"

Nancy simply bowed her head in an affirmative.

Goddard drew a deep breath. His eyes scanned her face yearningly.

"No man or circumstance shall part us," he said grimly.

"You forget, sir, that it is my privilege to choose my friends and acquaintances."

The accent on the last word was unmistakable. Goddard paled under his tan.

"Do you dislike me?" he demanded.

"Yes."

Goddard could not see the effort the monosyllable cost her. In bitter disappointment he dropped her hand. As Nancy turned abruptly away she tripped over the root of a tree. Instantly Goddard caught and steadied her. Her soft hair brushed his cheek . . . one breathless moment . . . he clasped her in his arms and showered kisses on the face pressed against

WHO LAUGHS LAST

his shoulder. Desperately Nancy wrenched herself free and disappeared inside the tent. With shining eyes and bounding pulse he rejoined Tucker and Lloyd by the camp fire.

Some hours later Goddard awoke from an uneasy sleep. At first, bewildered by his surroundings, he lay without moving; then gradually the occurrences of that day recurred to him. His thoughts flew to Nancy, and raising himself on his elbow he glanced in the direction of her improvised shelter some distance to his left.

In the stillness the snores of the sleeping men sounded clearly; surely it had not been that which had awakened him? As his eyes grew accustomed to the darkness he saw dimly the outlines of a man's figure approach Nancy's tent and disappear behind it. He was wide awake on the instant. Some midnight marauder was trying to enter her tent. The pickets were far away. Captain Tucker, knowing they were within the Confederate lines, had relaxed his vigilance, and the camp was but lightly guarded.

Goddard wasted no time in idle speculation. He slid out of his blanket; then softly, very softly, crouching behind each bush he stole toward the tent. Then cautiously, on hands and knees, he crept around it. He was about to rise when

THE LOST DESPATCH

fingers closed over his throat, and a heavy body fell upon him. Silently the two men struggled in the little clearing. Goddard's eyes were starting from his head as the pressure tightened on his windpipe. His breath came in panting gasps. With strength born of desperation he tore the gripping hands away, and the fresh air rushed into his stifled lungs.

"Lloyd! Lloyd! Help!" he gasped. His weak voice did not carry far; but the figure above him stiffened.

"My God! Is it you, Bob?" whispered Lloyd. "We have been fighting each other." He slid off Goddard's body, and assisted him to sit up.

"What—what—in blazes did you jump on me for?" demanded Goddard, in a hoarse whisper, tenderly feeling his aching throat.

"I did not know it was you, Bob. I have been dozing off and on; and suddenly heard a faint noise in this direction. Thinking it might be Tucker trying to communicate unseen with Miss Newton, I stole over here. When you came creeping around the corner there I sprang on you."

"Have you still got that bee in your bonnet?" whispered Goddard scornfully. "When will your persecution of that girl cease? Your search this

WHO LAUGHS LAST

morning proved she hadn't any despatch. Besides, you did not actually see her pick up that said despatch in Gautier's; you simply jumped to that conclusion because the despatch was not on the floor when you reached their table. Any one might have picked it up. Now, we both have proof that she has not communicated with Tucker. We mistook each other for him, that is all. Let's go back to our blankets." His advice was good, and Lloyd followed it.

Inside the tent, a girl, sad at heart, crouched against the canvas; her fingers felt around the *empty* hole in one of her pear-shaped earrings. As she deftly fitted the two halves together into one pendant she crooned softly:

Better the fire upon thee roll,
Better the blade, the shot, the bowl,
Than crucifixion of the soul,
Maryland! My Maryland!

CHAPTER XII

THE FIGHT AT THE FORD

THE sentry slackened his walk and rubbed his sleepy eyes. It was almost time for his relief. He glanced behind him at the motionless figures lying around the ashes of the camp fire. If it had been a bivouac of the dead the silence could not have been more profound. Even Lloyd had dropped into the heavy sleep that comes in the early hours of the morning. The guerilla gazed for a moment at the other sentries, dim shadowy forms in the early dawn; then continued on his way. He had almost reached the evergreen which marked the end of his patrol, when a faint, very faint, sound in the woods to his left caused him to wheel in that direction. Surely something moved among the trees. Instantly his challenge rang out:

"Who goes there? Halt! *Halt!* or I fire!"

A flash—a loud report! Tucker sprang to his feet as the camp awoke.

THE FIGHT AT THE FORD

"Up, men, up!" he roared. "Secure the prisoners; then mount."

Goddard, who had jumped up, stood bewildered for a second; then dashed toward Nancy's tent. A burly guerilla clutched him by the shoulder, but Goddard sent him reeling back with a well directed blow, and continued his race to the tent. He must shield Nancy.

"Stop, Goddard!" thundered Tucker. "Remember your parole."

"No parole holds in the presence of a rescue," panted Goddard. "Lloyd, Lloyd, this way, man!"

Frightened by the sudden commotion and firing, Nancy stepped out of the tent, followed by Miss Metoaca, and paused, uncertain where to go, or what to do. To his horror, Goddard saw a guerilla seize her roughly and push her toward the plunging, frightened horses. Miss Metoaca screamed.

With a bound Goddard threw himself forward and grappled with the man, who knocked Nancy roughly to one side the better to tackle the Union officer. Reeling backward and forward, the two men fought locked in a close embrace. The guerilla grasped an old pistol in his right hand, and tried desperately to use it; but Goddard kept its

THE LOST DESPATCH

muzzle turned skyward, and gradually forced the man's arm, folded, against the other's chest. Suddenly the guerilla tripped and stumbled backward, carrying Goddard down on top of him as he fell. A flash, a deafening report; the red-hot flame scared Goddard's face and forehead, and he sank into oblivion.

Tucker, whose right arm dangled helpless by his side, tried desperately to rally his men. They had sought what shelter they could and were returning the enemies' fire frantically.

"Secure the prisoners!" he shouted again and again. "Then to horse!"

Before his orders could be obeyed the Federals came crashing, bounding through the trees. The guerillas sent a volley into the advancing men; then turned and dashed for their horses. One moment of wild confusion, and they were in full flight, pursued by the cheering Federals. Tucker, seeing it was hopeless, dug spurs into his horse and raced after his men.

"Bob, Bob, where are you?" bellowed a stentorian voice, and a tall figure came sprinting toward the camp fire.

"Here," called Nancy. She was crouching by Goddard's body. Captain Gurley sped in the direction of her voice.

THE FIGHT AT THE FORD

"Nancy," he gasped. "Safe, thank God! But—where's Bob?"

"Here," Nancy again bent over the motionless man. "I—I—am afraid he is dead." The hopeless misery of her voice was not noticed by Gurley, who had dropped on his knees beside Goddard.

"This light may help you." Miss Metoaca reappeared on the scene with a candle in her hand. "The daylight is too dim in these woods to tell what is the matter with the major, so I went to get this candle out of my bag. Why, John, where did you drop from?"

"Winchester," was the brief reply, as Gurley examined Goddard's condition. "Belden, one of Colonel Young's spies, saw your capture. He followed you some distance to discover which road you took, then returned to the cantonment and reported. I was ordered in pursuit, and brought Belden with me. He knows this country by heart, so we were able to steal up on the camp and surprise the guerillas."

"It was splendidly done," declared Lloyd, who had silently approached in time to hear Gurley's last remarks. "I cannot express my thanks and admiration for your gallant rescue." Seeing Gurley's start of surprise and suspicion, he hastened

THE LOST DESPATCH

to add: "I am Captain George Lloyd, of the Secret Service"; then in another tone, "Is Bob badly hurt?"

"Can't tell yet," grunted Gurley. Nancy was gently wiping the powder-stained and bleeding face with some water which Symonds had brought her. "I think he is only stunned. Apparently the bullet did not penetrate; these are only flesh wounds," touching Goddard's face tenderly. "The powder has burned off his eyebrows, too. Miss Metoaca, have you any clothes which I can use for bandages?"

Without answering, the spinster hastened to her tent; she returned in a few moments with the necessary article and, pulling the edges of the wounds together, Gurley bandaged them as best he could.

"Won't a sip of this do him good?" inquired Miss Metoaca, unscrewing the stopper of a small flask. Lloyd forced some of the brandy down Goddard's throat. Quickly the stimulant took effect, and his eyelids fluttered faintly.

"He will come round all right," said Gurley, much relieved. "How soon can you and Nancy be ready to start for Winchester, Miss Metoaca?"

"We are ready now," was the prompt reply,

THE FIGHT AT THE FORD

"for we did not undress or unpack our bags last night."

"Good. Then we will leave at once; for we must get back inside our lines as quickly as possible. Mosby will hear of this skirmish, and may send a superior force after us. By the way, Miss Metoaca, did you ride or drive from Stevenson's Depot?"

"Drove in an open two-seated wagon."

"In that case I will put Major Goddard in the wagon with you. And you, Captain Lloyd?"

"If you will permit me, I will ride Major Goddard's mare; that is, if she hasn't been stampeded, or carried off by the guerillas. Symonds, my assistant, who drove the ladies, can surely drive them back."

"All right." Gurley nodded curtly. "I see no objection to that plan. Will you assist the ladies in getting their belongings into the wagon? I must see if there are any casualties among our men. Orderly, stay here with Major Goddard, and let me know instantly if he regains consciousness."

The troopers were returning from their fruitless pursuit of the guerillas, and they congregated about the lieutenant, who was busy examining the prisoners.

THE LOST DESPATCH

"Nine prisoners, Captain," he reported, as Gurley strode up. "Wounded, but not badly enough to prevent their riding. Five guerillas were killed, and three of our men. They are lying yonder," pointing to a clump of trees.

"Were any of our men wounded?"

"Three have flesh wounds—nothing serious."

"Then bury the dead as quickly as you can . . ."

"Is Major Goddard dead?" inquired the lieutenant anxiously, not waiting for his superior to finish his sentence.

"No, indeed," cheerily, "simply stunned by the explosion of an old pistol before his face. Sergeant, take some men and carry Major Goddard over to that wagon standing by the roadside."

Symonds had removed one of the long cushions belonging to the back wagon seat, and the men carefully lifted Goddard on it, and carried him as gently as possible and placed him in the wagon.

"Sit here, Nancy," directed Gurley, "and hold on to Bob; otherwise I am afraid he will fall out."

Nancy sprang into the wagon and made Goddard as comfortable as she could. Miss Metoaca, who had been occupied in putting her luggage under the seat, clambered into the vehicle and sat



“I—I—am afraid he is dead.”

1000

THE FIGHT AT THE FORD

down by Symonds. The mules had been hitched to the wagon by the sergeant and two troopers.

"All ready, Miss Metoaca?" asked Gurley, tucking the laprobe around the spinster. "Bugler, sound 'Boots and Saddles.'"

As the call ended man after man filed out into the path leading his horse, and the ranks were rapidly formed by Sergeant Crane. A few swift orders, and the troop started on their return trip to Winchester, the wagon, followed by the mounted prisoners, in their midst.

CHAPTER XIII

FOR THE CAUSE

CAPTAIN GURLEY pushed open the rickety gate impatiently, and strode up the walk to "Page Hall" with jingling spurs and clanking saber. The rambling old house, with shutters askew, bore mute testimony to the fallen fortunes of its owner. The paint was peeling off the tall pillars, and the boards of the gallery shook ominously under Gurley's weight.

"Miss Page done say yo' was ter walk inter de pawler, Marse Cap'in," said the old darky, bowing and scraping on the threshold of the open door, "an' Miss Nancy'll be down d'reckly."

Gurley followed the old man in to the big, square room, and waited with what patience he could muster for Nancy's appearance. When she finally entered the room she was dressed for walking.

"Do you think the authorities would allow me

FOR THE CAUSE

to send a telegram, John?" she asked, after a few words of greeting.

"I don't know, Nancy; Colonel Smith is very strict. But I can ask him. Is it important?"

"Aunt Metoaca has just received a letter from our cousin, Mrs. Green, saying that her house was burned to the ground, and she is homeless. So Aunty wants to telegraph her to go to our house, and that we will return to Washington at once."

Gurley's face fell. "Oh, don't say you are going away. I am sorry about Mrs. Green's misfortune; but surely your servants can take care of her in your absence?"

"Mrs. Green is a cripple, and we fear the shock and exposure at the time of the fire may make her ill. Aunt Metoaca also feels that she should be with her cousin in case she is financially embarrassed by her loss."

"I will escort you to the telegraph office, Nancy, and try and arrange to have your despatch sent at once. But I call it beastly hard luck," grumbled Gurley, as they sauntered through Miss Page's garden and into the main street of the town. "I have hardly seen a thing of you; you spend your entire time with Bob Goddard . . ."

"Reading to him," supplemented Nancy calmly.

THE LOST DESPATCH

"It is the least I can do, John, when you think that he was injured in trying to protect me."

"I wish to gracious my eyes had been blinded by the explosion of that pistol," exclaimed Gurley bitterly. "Then perhaps I might have enjoyed some of your society."

"For shame!" Nancy stopped and glared indignantly at her companion. "Do you think my society compensates for a ruined career? Think of being doomed to a life of dependence upon others—in darkness for the rest of your days!"

"It must be horrible," agreed Gurley contritely. "I spoke hastily, Nancy, and without thought. Doesn't the surgeon hold out any hope that Bob may recover his sight?"

"He has advised Major Goddard to consult Doctor Boyd, and I think he expects to return to Washington soon to be under the latter's care."

"I sincerely hope he recovers. Goddard is too fine a fellow to have his life blasted by such a fate," said Gurley earnestly, ashamed of his churlishness. "I did hope, Nancy, that you would remain in Winchester for the fox-hunt on the 28th. Colonel Young has secured three red foxes, and a large pack of hounds from the people in the neighborhood. It promises to be great sport. Do postpone going away until March."

FOR THE CAUSE

"I wish I could, John, but I fear it is out of the question. Is this the place?"

"Yes; this way."

The sentry in front of the house paused and inspected them carefully, then, recognizing Gurley, allowed them to pass. Gurley held the door open for Nancy, and stepped after her into the room. She glanced with interest at her surroundings; the bare walls, worn pine furniture, the operators' tables with their telegraph equipments, the shelves of batteries, and at the half dozen men who filled the room. Seeing a woman in their midst all conversation ceased, and the officers rose and hurriedly pulled on coats and removed hats. Considerably embarrassed, Nancy hesitated, and Gurley came to her rescue.

"Colonel Smith," he said, saluting a tall gray-haired officer who stood by the stove, "this is Miss Newton. She has a pass from President Lincoln to Winchester, and is visiting her relative, Miss Lindsay Page. Miss Newton desires to send a telegram to Washington for her aunt, Miss Metoaca Newton, who is also visiting Miss Page."

"I already know your aunt, Miss Newton." The colonel advanced and shook hands warmly. "What is the message you wish to send?" He

THE LOST DESPATCH

listened attentively to Nancy's explanation. "If that is all, Miss Newton, I will have the despatch sent to Washington as soon as the wires are free. Wilson, will you clear that table and give Miss Newton some paper and ink. Now, if you will sit here," pushing a chair before the table, "you can write your despatch at your leisure."

"Thank you, Colonel!" Nancy bowed gravely to the officers who made way for her, and, seating herself, she toyed with the pen a moment.

The officers reseated themselves and resumed their interrupted chat, glancing covertly at Nancy as often as they could. Colonel Smith and Gurley were standing by the window so deep in conversation that neither noticed the flight of time.

Nancy wrote down Mrs. Green's temporary address in Washington; then paused to compose her message. The telegraph instruments kept up an incessant clicking. Almost subconsciously she listened to the instrument nearest her; apparently the sender was having trouble in getting his message over the wire. A dash—two dots—another dash—then quickly the instrument woke to full life, and Nancy realized with fast beating heart that she was reading off a despatch of vital importance with the same ease as the Union operator who was receiving it. Her lessons in the

FOR THE CAUSE

War Department in Richmond were not wasted.

With a desperate effort Nancy controlled herself, and sat with impassive face as she dallied with her pen. The instrument stopped sounding, the despatch was given to a waiting orderly, and Nancy wrote a few words on a fresh piece of paper and signed her aunt's name. Then she rose.

"I hope this message is not too long," she said, handing the paper to Colonel Smith. "It took me some time to condense my aunt's message."

"It is all right. I will see that it is sent myself. Please give my compliments to your aunt," and the gallant colonel escorted her to the door.

"I have to see Colonel Edwards a moment, Nancy," said Gurley, as they started to retrace their steps to Miss Page's. "Do you mind going to his house with me?"

"Oh, no."

"This way, then. Do you see much of Captain Lloyd?"

"No." Nancy was devoutly thankful for the fact. "Why do you ask?"

"His face puzzles me—an elusive likeness to some one I have known formerly, and whose name I cannot for the life of me recollect. I have an idea the fellow avoids me."

THE LOST DESPATCH

"Perhaps . . ." A man in nondescript clothes slouched along the sidewalk just ahead of Nancy. As he stepped back to allow her room to pass he straightened up and looked her squarely in the face. Nancy's voice died in her throat.

"What did you say, Nancy?" asked Gurley, whose attention had been diverted by the bolting of a horse down the crowded street.

Nancy's lips were dry and she moistened them with her tongue before answering. "Perhaps Major Goddard can tell you something about Captain Lloyd. They seem to be warm friends."

"That's a good idea. I will ask Bob the next time I see him alone." They stopped before an old mansion which Colonel Edwards had taken for his quarters, and Gurley led the way inside the broad hall. "Now, Nancy, if you will wait in this side room," conducting her across the hall, "no one will disturb you here."

"Don't be long, John."

"I won't," and Gurley carefully shut the door behind him as he went out.

Nancy walked over to the window, raised the curtain and looked out into the street. The stranger in nondescript clothes was standing in front of the house talking to the corporal of the

FOR THE CAUSE

guard. He produced a soiled paper, at sight of which the corporal signed to him to enter. Nancy, sure that she had been seen by him, dropped the curtain into place and returned to the mantel. She drew out a piece of paper and a small pencil and, leaning on the mantel, wrote rapidly. She had just finished when the hall door was cautiously opened. Quickly she crumpled the paper in her hand; then, seeing the intruder's face, she stepped into the center of the room. The man entered and closed the door gently behind him.

"George!" Nancy's voice was no more than a whisper. "Are you mad? Suppose you are recognized?"

"It is not likely to happen. Don't be so worried, Nancy," the Confederate moved swiftly to her side and caught her outstretched hand in both of his. "One of Young's spies was captured inside our lines. I am using his pass and his clothes. Believe me, I am running no unnecessary risks. Tucker told me you were here. I laid my plans carefully, so as not to involve you if my disguise is penetrated. Have you any news for us?"

"This despatch has just come for Sheridan; it is of vital importance," Nancy unrolled the paper. "It is in cipher. I have not had time to translate

THE LOST DESPATCH

it, so just jotted down the words and put the key at the bottom."

"Good." The Confederate took the paper and concealed it about his person. "General Lee has recommended arming the blacks."

"What!"

"It has become a military necessity," briefly. "Columbia has surrendered to Sherman; we have evacuated Charleston, and the Yanks under General Gilmore are occupying the city. All the ammunition and provisions stored there and in the vicinity were destroyed." Nancy uttered an exclamation. "We are in such straits we cannot find money to replace the loss," went on Pegram bitterly. "Our currency," he shrugged his shoulders expressively, "in Richmond gold is 4,400 per cent. premium; the women and children are suffering daily privations there which——"

"George, can't you take me with you to Richmond?" broke in Nancy passionately. "I will gladly endure all and every privation; for I am sick, *sick* of worming secrets from trusting friends, and spying upon those who shelter me."

George Pegram looked at her aghast. "Nancy, Nancy, what are you saying?" Then, glancing more keenly at her, "You are over-

FOR THE CAUSE

wrought, child. You won't feel the same after a good night's rest."

"*Rest*, did you say? I feel as if I could never rest in peace again. I tell you, George, I am living under the shadow of the gallows. At night I dream the noose is fastened about my throat, and wake myself feeling for the rope."

"Poor child!" He stroked Nancy's hair soothingly. "You have done us inestimable service. Lee told me that he had the greatest admiration for your ability and pluck."

Nancy smiled wanly. "Thanks, George, for telling me that. But I fear my days of usefulness are over; I am already suspected. Captain Lloyd, of the Secret Service, is dogging my footsteps, waiting and watching for a fatal slip on my part, so far without success. But you know the fate of the pitcher that went too often to the well."

"I will back your quick wits against any man's. But I never thought to find you lacking in courage, Nancy."

Stung by his tone, she drew back. "How dare you say such a thing! I am not afraid to face danger. It's—it's—this life of deceit that is killing me."

"The end justifies the means, Nancy. Remember your oath to a dying man."

THE LOST DESPATCH

"I have remembered," proudly, "and in keeping it have forgotten sex, and played the part of a man. But," more calmly, "I can be of little use now that I am suspected."

"You are wrong, Nancy. We are fighting against time now. Soon, very soon, the Confederate States of America will be recognized by the foreign powers. Lee has come to the conclusion that Petersburg and Richmond must be abandoned; that only in the mountainous regions upon the borders of Virginia and North Carolina can the war be protracted. He wishes to get his army safely out of Petersburg. Therefore, it is imperative that we know Grant's plans so that we can checkmate them. Your place is in Washington, Nancy. Your father gave his life for the Cause, would you do less?"

"He died an honorable death—while I——" Nancy's voice broke; then in a different tone: "You must go, George, every moment may increase your danger. Tell General Lee I am still fighting for the Cause."

"For the Cause!" echoed her companion. "It claims us all! God bless you, Nancy."

He threw his arms about her and, stooping, pressed his lips to her white cheek; then stood transfixed as the hall door swung slowly open, dis-

FOR THE CAUSE

closing a Union officer facing them on the threshold. Nancy's lips moved, but no sound escaped her. Her terrified eyes stared unblinkingly at the newcomer.

"Is any one here?" asked Goddard slowly.

Nancy's muscles relaxed and she leaned limply against the Confederate. She had forgotten that Goddard was blind. A slight pause—then she spoke.

"It is I, Nancy Newton. I was so surprised to see you without your bandages that it quite took my breath away. Nor did I realize you were strong enough to leave your quarters."

Goddard's sad face had brightened, and he made a hesitating step forward. "My orderly brought me over here, as I wished to say good-bye to Colonel Edwards. I am practicing finding my way about alone." He turned directly toward the Confederate, who, watching with breathless interest, was waiting to take his cue from Nancy.

"Won't you sit by me over here?" Nancy went forward, and gently piloted Goddard to the sofa by the window. She turned and nodded her head toward the open door, and with catlike quickness the Confederate stole from the room, closing the door behind him. Nancy's knees

THE LOST DESPATCH

shook under her, and she sank on the sofa by Goddard, trembling in every limb.

"I have waited in my rooms all day long, hoping you would come." Goddard reached over, and felt about for Nancy's hand, and she placed her cold fingers reluctantly in his. "Are you having a chill?" he asked, alarmed.

"Oh, no; my hands are always cold," with well-simulated lightness; then she hastened to change the subject. "I am glad you are so much better."

"Thanks. Doctor Scott is very much encouraged by my improvement, and insists on my going to Washington to-morrow. He says I must see Doctor Boyd."

"And he is right."

"I know." Goddard hesitated. "I should have gone last week, but—but—I could not bear to leave you."

Nancy flushed warmly. "Aunt Metoaca and I return to Washington on the same train with you. So you see we will not be separated—yet."

"God! how I wish it could be never, my darling!" The words seemed wrung from Goddard. His face laid bare his secret. Then pulling himself up abruptly: "I—I—ask your pardon—Miss Nancy—pay no heed. For the moment I forgot—my blindness. What I would ask in

FOR THE CAUSE

happier circumstances cannot be spoken now."

Nancy's answer was drowned in the sudden rush of feet outside, and the shout: "Corporal of the guard, this way!"

The door was dashed open, and Lloyd, followed by a file of soldiers, strode into the room.

"Arrest——" He stopped short and gazed blankly at Nancy and Goddard. One searching look around showed him they were the only occupants of the room.

"What is the matter?" demanded Goddard, much startled.

"We are searching for a rebel spy who entered Winchester with a false pass. The corporal thinks he saw him enter this room thirty minutes ago."

"I beg pardon, Captain; it might have been Major Goddard that I saw. It is dark in the hall, and I did not see clearly," interrupted the bewildered corporal.

"How long have you been in this room, Bob?" asked Lloyd sternly.

Nancy's fingers closed convulsively over the edge of the sofa. Goddard's sightless eyes were turned for an instant in her direction.

"Nearly three-quarters of an hour, Lloyd," was the tranquil answer.

CHAPTER XIV

WHEN TRAGEDY GRINS

AS usual, Tad, it is your stomach that is cutting up. Haven't you any other organ in your body?"

Tad Lincoln pulled the bedclothes up about his shoulders, and smiled sheepishly at Doctor Boyd. "It was the cream puffs," he murmured apologetically.

"And two weeks ago—candy. You are incorrigible. What's this?" The doctor picked an oblong slip of paper off the pillow. It was a check, and read:

"Pay to the order of Tad Lincoln 50c—
Fifty Cents—for having his tooth pulled.

"A. LINCOLN."*

"Did it hurt when it came out?" asked Boyd gravely. For reply, the boy opened his mouth, and disclosed a vacancy in the shining ivories. "Well, don't eat this money up. One attack of indigestion should be enough this month." Tad's

* A true story.

WHEN TRAGEDY GRINS

face fell; he had already planned how he would spend that fifty cents.

"Is anything much the matter with Tad, Doctor?" inquired the President, entering the bedroom. "Sit down," as Boyd rose. "I stole up from the levee to ask you how he is."

"Just a slight attack of indigestion, due to over-eating, Mr. President. He will be all right to-morrow."

"Poor Tad." Lincoln stroked the small, hot head. "It is my fault, Doctor. Mrs. Lincoln was out; so he and I just browsed 'round for dinner. I ate most of the meat, and he the cream puffs. It wasn't an equal division, was it, Tad? Must you be going, Doctor?"

"Yes; if one of these green tablets dissolved in half a glass of water is given every three hours the nausea will cease. By the way, Mr. President, before I leave, I want to ask if you will give me a pass through our lines to Richmond. I have received word that my brother lies dangerously wounded in one of their hospitals. We have not met for years, and I"—the doctor cleared his throat—"I would like to see him once again before we are parted for aye."

"Certainly!" Lincoln strode over to Tad's table and wrote a few lines; then tore off the top

THE LOST DESPATCH

sheet from the latter's school pad. "I hope this will help you. I've given passes to Richmond to my generals, but they haven't got there yet."

Lincoln's careworn face lighted with his rare smile. The strain of hope deferred was telling on the President, and Doctor Boyd scrutinized him professionally for a moment.

"I've seen you look worse," he growled, "but what I don't understand is how you keep so damned good-natured."

Lincoln laughed heartily. "That is the question I once asked the wife of one of our backwoodsmen. He would abuse her in public, and she always took it smilingly, so I asked her how she managed it: 'When Jim gets too much for me, I just goes in and bites the bureau. I know I'm doing more harm than he is, and it keeps me good-natured.' My 'bureau' is pretty well scarred by now," added Lincoln, chuckling. "I don't wish to detain you, Doctor, but Mrs. Lincoln wants to see you a moment in the East Room if you can stop there on your way out. Now, Tad, be a good boy, and obey the nurse."

"And don't eat too much," cautioned Doctor Boyd, as he followed the President out of the room.

The East Room was crowded with the usual

WHEN TRAGEDY GRINS

throngs that gathered every Thursday night. After reassuring Mrs. Lincoln as to her son's condition, Doctor Boyd stationed himself behind the President and watched the animated scene with interest, for once forgetful of his duties elsewhere. Men and women in every walk of life were present. Generals rubbed elbows with privates; statesmen with day laborers; well-dressed women stood next women in faded and patched attire. All were greeted by a cordial handshake and a pleasant word as they filed past Lincoln. The doctor smiled sardonically as he saw the circle of admirers about pretty Mrs. Bennett. Was it possible that her blue eyes, childlike in their candor, her simpering smile, and affected manner were masks assumed to cover her machinations? She a Union spy? It seemed incredible. If so, was she clever enough to injure Nancy? Moving with the crowd, she gradually worked her way to where Boyd stood.

"You never find time to come to my house, Doctor," she pouted.

"Send for me professionally," retorted Boyd, "and I will come at once."

"I captured Doctor Boyd this evening," interposed the President, turning toward them. "He does not usually honor my levees."

THE LOST DESPATCH

"A busy man has small opportunity," began Boyd hastily.

"I know, Doctor; I know." The President laid a kindly hand on his arm. "Isn't that Mrs. Arnold over there?"

"Yes," answered Mrs. Bennett. "We came together, for Mrs. Arnold is obliged to go out alone, as her husband is too busy acquiring wealth to accompany her to entertainments."

"I cannot understand why a man should work so hard for *that*," said the President thoughtfully. "Wealth is simply a superfluity of what we don't need."

"Who is that good-looking officer talking to my husband and Mrs. Arnold?" questioned Mrs. Bennett.

"Brevet-Colonel Hilton," Lincoln smiled mischievously. "He is one of my bravest officers, having behaved with conspicuous gallantry at Gettysburg and Cedar Creek. But the night of the first Bull Run, his body servant was asked by his family, who 'are Washingtonians, if he had seen his master during the battle. 'Deed I done seed him at de end ob de fight, and Marse Sam was on de mos' *retreatenist* hoss in de army.'"

WHEN TRAGEDY GRINS

"Thank God, we do not have to live over those first days of the war," said Boyd devoutly. "They tried men's souls."

"Ah, I do thank God," the President sighed wearily. His surroundings faded from view. Instead, he saw the awful carnage of a battlefield. In his ears sounded the thunder of guns; the cheers of the victors; and the moans of the dying. With an effort, he put such thoughts from him. "And yet those days had their comic side, Doctor; even tragedy grins occasionally. I recollect that a regiment, who wore the uniform of Highlanders, reached here after the battle of Bull Run utterly demoralized. Like thousands of other soldiers, they threw away pretty much everything they had. Their costume was abbreviated in the beginning, and after Bull Run," the President's eyes twinkled, "lots of them had to borrow skirts and blankets to cover their bareness. One of these men gravely told me that the rebels in the trenches were perched on teterboards, and when one end came up to fire, the other end went down to load. Good evening, Mrs. Arnold." He turned to shake hands with her and Colonel Bennett.

"Why, Doctor Boyd," exclaimed Mrs. Arnold; "you here! I hope it means that you are giving

THE LOST DESPATCH

up night work, and so can come to our housewarming on Monday night."

"As much as I should like to, I am afraid I cannot," rejoined Boyd. "I expect to be called out of town at any time, but"—as her face fell—"if I am in the city I will surely go to you."

"It is a shame if you do have to go away just then," declared Mrs. Arnold, "because my husband counted on you to help him through the evening, as he detests social gatherings."

"Ah, there comes that charming Monsieur Mercier," chimed in Mrs. Bennett, as the French Minister strove to make his way through the crowded room.

"Mercier has never recovered from his disappointment at his failure to induce his government to recognize the Confederacy,"* laughed Colonel Bennett. "It hurt his *amour propre*."

"Men are not flattered by being shown that there has been a difference of purpose between the Almighty and them," was Lincoln's noncommittal reply. He turned to cross the room, but Mrs. Arnold, who had been an interested listener, detained him for a moment.

"Do you speak French, Mr. President?" she inquired.

* See "Abraham Lincoln," by Nicholay and Hay.

WHEN TRAGEDY GRINS

There was a quizzical gleam in Lincoln's eyes as he replied slowly and with emphasis: "No, Mrs. Arnold; only English, and that not very well," and he moved on up the room.

Disconcerted by the expression on Doctor Boyd's face, Mrs. Arnold asked hastily, "How is poor Major Goddard? I hear he is under your care now."

"He is badly shaken up physically," returned Boyd.

"Is there no prospect of his regaining his sight, Doctor?" inquired Mrs. Bennett.

"Only time can tell."

"It is too dreadful," commented Mrs. Bennett. "I like Major Goddard so much, and to think of his being helpless the rest of his life is most distressing. Will you let him receive company, Doctor? Because I would like to go and read to him."

Boyd scanned Mrs. Bennett intently, without replying to her last remark. Why this sudden interest in Goddard? It behooved him to find out.

"And I want to send him some jellies," volunteered Mrs. Arnold. "What is his address, Doctor?"

"At present he is occupying Captain Lloyd's

THE LOST DESPATCH

rooms at Mrs. Lane's boarding house on F Street across from the Ebbitt." Boyd hesitated for a perceptible moment. Would it be wise to allow Mrs. Bennett to interview Goddard? Would she be able to worm any information about Nancy's adventures in Winchester from the Major?

"Perhaps Captain Lloyd would not like our calling," suggested Mrs. Arnold, breaking the slight pause.

"Oh, Lloyd is not in town now, though Goddard expects him back some time next week."

"Did Major Goddard make the trip from Winchester alone?" asked Mrs. Bennett in surprise.

"No. Miss Newton and her niece looked after him, with the assistance of a man they called 'Symonds.' I met them at the station, and took Goddard to his rooms, and engaged an attendant for him, as he cannot get about without a body-servant now."

"From last accounts, Nancy Newton has behaved abominably to John," began Mrs. Arnold angrily. "She is a miserable flirt . . ."

"You mustn't run down my friend Nancy," said Lincoln, who had returned in time to hear

WHEN TRAGEDY GRINS

the last remark. "She and Tad are great chums; he is devoted to her."

"I was only going to say," stammered Mrs. Arnold, "that Nancy has treated my nephew very shabbily; first encouraged his suit, then threw him over in the most bare-faced manner for—Major Goddard."

CHAPTER XV

NEMESIS

COME up, Symonds; come up!" called Lloyd from the head of the stairs. The old colored cook, protesting under her breath at having to mount to the second story to announce visitors, had not waited to take a message to Symonds, but returned at once to her domain by way of the back stairs. Lloyd's voice was so imperative that Symonds took the steps two at a time, and arrived breathless at the top, to find Lloyd, booted and spurred, and covered from head to foot with a thick layer of mud, waiting impatiently for him.

"I have caught her, Symonds," he cried exultingly. "By God! I've caught her this time." Then, more calmly: "I have absolute proof here," tapping his chest, "that she is a rebel spy. Come in, and I will tell you about it." And half dragging Symonds into his sitting room, he slammed to the door. "It's been a long chase and a stern chase, but I have won at last." He

NEMESIS

dropped heavily into an armchair, and signed to Symonds to take the one opposite him.

"That is splendid!" said Symonds, with satisfaction. "I was afraid something had happened to you, Captain, and have just been over to the Bureau to find out if they had news of you. They told me they knew nothing of your whereabouts, so I stopped here to ask Major Goddard if he could tell me where you were."

"Was Colonel Baker at the Bureau?"

"No, sir; he is in Baltimore, but will be back to-night."

"What has Miss Newton been doing since her return to Washington?"

"Nothing of a suspicious character. I hear that she is going to Mrs. Arnold's ball to-night."

"Well, we will put an end to her masterly inactivity." Lloyd chuckled so vindictively that Symonds glanced at him in surprise.

"You seem to hate Miss Newton, Captain?"

"Hate? Well, perhaps that is too strong a word, Symonds, though I can be a good hater of those who have wronged me. Miss Newton's cleverness put me on my mettle. I cannot say I enjoyed being outwitted by a girl, but I could forgive her that. What has roused my dislike, my bitter dislike, is that she has turned Major

THE LOST DESPATCH

Goddard against me. I can never forgive her for that. He has been my lifelong friend; now, he avoids me—and it cuts deep!” Lloyd spoke with intense feeling.

“How comes it, then, that you have the same rooms here?”

“Probably Major Goddard is planning to move to another boarding house; I have not seen him since my return. Mrs. Lane told me he had gone for a drive, accompanied by his attendant. I am glad he is out, for I do not relish telling him Miss Newton will be arrested to-night. I prefer to have him learn it from some one else.”

“You say you have absolute proof of her guilt?” questioned Symonds.

“Absolute. She will not slip through my fingers this time. As I told you in Winchester, Symonds, I was convinced that Major Goddard, to shield Miss Newton, told a deliberate lie when he said he had been in that room over half an hour. I was sure she had seen and talked with that rebel spy; so I wasted no time making further inquiries at the house, but, with Colonel Young’s permission, took Belden and started in pursuit of him.

“Belden knows that country like a book, and he guessed the route the rebel would take. We

NEMESIS

had two of the best horses in the cavalry, and, to cut a long story short, we headed him off, and forced him back toward our lines. His horse was almost spent when we came up with him. It was two to one. He died bravely. We found his name on an envelope, 'George Pegram, —th Virginia Cavalry,' and this paper." Lloyd unbuttoned his coat, and drew out a leather wallet. "Here it is—see"—he opened a small crumpled paper—"not only the cipher message verbatim, as received that afternoon in Winchester, but the key to our code. It is damning evidence, and it will hang her." He folded the paper, replaced it in his pocketbook, which he slipped back in his inside coat pocket; then resumed his story:

"We were returning to Winchester when we almost ran slam-bang into some of Mosby's guerillas. To avoid them, we had to go miles out of our way. Twice we were nearly captured by scouting parties of Early's forces; then some of Lomax' cavalry chased us still deeper inside the rebel lines. It took us four days to reach Snicker's Gap, and so on to Washington. Since I last saw you, I have been constantly in the saddle without rest and without sufficient food." Lloyd's face was drawn and haggard, and his eyes inflamed and heavy from lack of sleep. See-

THE LOST DESPATCH

ing Symonds' look of concern, he added: "Mrs. Lane brought me up a cold lunch. I intended going at once to see Colonel Baker, but, as he is away, I will let you apply for the necessary papers to arrest her. I must get some sleep. I cannot stay awake another moment. Stay," as Symonds hastened to the hall door. "You meet Colonel Baker; tell him what I have told you, and have him arrest the girl. And send a messenger to me when she is taken to the provost marshal's, and I will join you there." He stretched himself and yawned. "Be sure and send for me, Symonds," he called, "for I shall sleep like the dead."

"All right, Captain; I will have you called."

Lloyd went thoughtfully back into his sitting room, stood for a moment undecided, then walked through the communicating door into the next room. The two single beds, bureaus, table and chairs but partially filled the bedroom, which was unusually large. There were two side windows, and two doors, one of which opened directly into the back hall, and the other into the sitting room.

Lloyd did not trouble to undress. He kicked off his muddy boots, and tossed them into a corner of the room; removed his coat and hung it

NEMESIS

on the back of a chair; then threw himself on the outside of one of the beds, drawing a quilt over him. His head had hardly touched the pillow before his regular breathing testified that he had fallen into the heavy slumber of utter exhaustion.

Mrs. Arnold's ball was in full swing when Nancy and her aunt arrived. Nancy did not look well, to Miss Metoaca's concern, who tersely advised her to pull herself together, or else stay at home. If she had followed the latter course, Miss Metoaca would have been bitterly disappointed, for she greatly enjoyed going to parties and watching Nancy's belleship.

Nancy much preferred staying quietly at home. Dull care dogged her footsteps; Goddard's pathetic face haunted her memory. Do what she could; go where she would, she could never banish from her mind his halting, passionate words spoken on that never-forgotten day in Winchester. After all, did she wish to?

Mrs. Arnold's spacious new house was filled with members of the cabinet and their wives; some of the foreign ministers and their secretaries, and Washington's residential circle, which consisted of about forty-five persons, all told, who

THE LOST DESPATCH

religiously attended each other's parties, and occasionally went to the President's levees, and the entertainments of the diplomatic corps and the cabinet officers. A "social column" in the daily paper was never heard of; but, notwithstanding, each person knew when the other was giving a party or entertaining house guests. Occasionally a paragraph was slipped in the *National Intelligencer*, saying: "Miss H—— attended Mrs. R——'s reception," but even that was considered very bad form, though initials only were given.

Mrs. Arnold received Nancy and her aunt with some reserve. She did not want her nephew to marry Nancy, but still less, with true feminine inconsistency, did she want him to be jilted by such a chit of a girl. She also stood very much in awe of Miss Metoaca's ready wit and formidable tongue.

Nancy was immediately carried off by an impatient partner for the next dance, and Miss Metoaca was left chatting with Senator Warren and Lord Lyons, the British minister. Mrs. Arnold, flushed with her labors as hostess, stopped near them, and the Englishman turned at once and complimented her on the decorations of her ball-room.

"I am delighted you approve of my taste, your

NEMESIS

Excellency," she said complacently. "Have you seen our new oil painting which my husband has just purchased at Goupil's in New York?"

"No, I have not had that pleasure," replied the diplomat courteously.

"Then come with me. You, too, Miss Metoaca, and Senator Warren. I would very much like your opinion of the painting. It is called 'Jupiter and Ten.' What 'Ten' has to do with it is beyond me. There are not ten figures in the picture; nor did we pay ten dollars for it."

By that time they had reached the painting, a fine work by a famous artist. Underneath, on the brass name plate, were the words: "JUPITER AND IO."

"The technique is fine," murmured Lord Lyons feebly, adjusting his monocle. Whereat Mrs. Arnold beamed with delight.

"It is indeed an excellent painting," exclaimed Miss Metoaca, her eyes twinkling. "You are to be congratulated, Mrs. Arnold. I must go and find Nancy, as I want to introduce her to Mrs. Scott, the wife of the new member from Pennsylvania."

"Let me escort you, Miss Metoaca," said the Senator gallantly.

Nancy was not hard to find, and, after she had

THE LOST DESPATCH

met Mrs. Scott, Senator Warren asked her to sit out a dance with him.

"If I can escape my next partner, I will do so with pleasure."

"Suppose we sit in that alcove by the palms, he will never find us there," suggested the senator, and he led the way to the sofa, which was partially concealed from view, only to find Mrs. Bennett comfortably installed on one end of it.

"There is plenty of room for all," she declared, as Nancy drew back. "Colonel Bennett has gone with Mr. Arnold, and, being partnerless, I came over here to enjoy watching the dancers. Where is Mrs. Warren this evening, Senator?"

"Sick in bed with a bad headache," returned Warren, sitting down between the two women. "I would not have come to-night, but she insisted it would not be neighborly to back out at the last moment."

"So, like an obedient American husband, you sacrificed yourself," laughed Nancy, her small foot keeping time to the dreamy strains of the waltz, "Brightest Eyes."

"I am managing to have a very comfortable time," retorted the Senator. He ceased speaking

NEMESIS

as a man in uniform stepped to Nancy's side and touched her on the shoulder.

"Miss Newton, you are to come with me."

Nancy turned quickly, and her face whitened. The sword of Damocles had fallen.

"What do you mean, Baker?" demanded Warren sharply.

"That Miss Newton is under arrest, Mr. Senator. I advise the young lady to come quietly."

Nancy rose. "I shall make no scene," she said haughtily. "Go on, sir, and I will follow."

"I prefer that you should go first," said Baker quickly.

"One moment," interrupted Warren. "Where are you taking Miss Newton?" Baker hesitated. "I insist on an answer."

Senator Warren was a power on Capitol Hill, and the Secret Service officer did not care to offend him.

"She is to be taken to the War Department. Secretary Stanton wishes to interview her," he answered at last.

"My dear! My dear!" ejaculated Mrs. Bennett, who had sat speechless with surprise. "This is too dreadful. Can I not accompany you? or my husband? We know the secretary well, and

THE LOST DESPATCH

will use our influence to secure your immediate release."

"Miss Newton goes with me *alone*," interposed Baker harshly. "I will allow no outside interference." And he looked significantly at Mrs. Bennett.

"Many thanks, Mrs. Bennett." The older woman colored hotly under her scrutiny, and Nancy's suspicions were instantly aroused. Had she and Lloyd planned her arrest? "I will not trouble you, however, to exert your influence in my behalf, because I am convinced I shall be set free the moment I have talked this affair over with Secretary Stanton. Senator Warren, will you take Aunt Metoaca home, and explain to her about this ridiculous arrest."

"I will, and will join you afterward at the War Department. There is undoubtedly some explanation, and, as your friend, I will investigate the matter at once."

Nancy impulsively extended her hand; she could not voice her thanks. It was some seconds before she regained her self-control; then she addressed Baker. "Now, Colonel, I am ready to go with you." She turned disdainfully, and walked proudly across the room, spoke to Mrs. Arnold, then went directly into the

NEMESIS

hall. "May I go for my wrap?" she asked the Secret Service officer, who followed at her heels.

"No, send the maid for it," was the surly reply.

It did not take the colored girl long to find the wrap, and, escorted by Baker, Nancy ran down the steps and entered the waiting hack. They drove in absolute silence, Nancy gazing straight before her with brooding eyes. Never had he escorted so quiet a prisoner, and Baker was glad when they reached the War Department. He wasted no time, but took her at once to the private office of the Secretary of War.

"Here is Miss Newton, Mr. Secretary," he announced, signing to Nancy to enter the room first.

"To what do I owe my arrest, Secretary Stanton?" asked Nancy, walking quietly up to his desk.

Stanton glanced piercingly at her. Her proud, cold beauty and distinguished appearance stirred a momentary feeling of admiration in the "Iron Secretary's" breast. He half rose, then sank again into his chair.

"Be seated," he directed shortly. "Baker, close that door." He took off his spectacles,

THE LOST DESPATCH

wiped them carefully, then replaced them on his nose. "You asked me?"

"Why I am arrested?" steadily.

"Isn't that an unnecessary question?"

"No. I am not a mind reader."

"You need not strain your imagination. Do you know Major George Pegram, of the —th Virginia Cavalry?"

"I do. He is my cousin."

"He *was*." Stanton stopped and eyed Nancy intently; but she sat as if carved from stone. Not by cry or sign did she betray the shock his words gave her. "Major Pegram was killed last Wednesday, when trying to get through our lines about Winchester."

"Poor fellow!" Nancy's tone was keyed to express simply natural sorrow and regret. "I am sure his death became him."

Stanton looked baffled, as his bomb shell exploded without apparent effect. Was there no vulnerable spot in her armor of iron self-control? After a moment he continued his examination.

"Your cousin was killed by Captain Lloyd, of the Secret Service, who took from his dead body the cipher despatch which you secured under the noses of a room full of my officers at Winches-

NEMESIS

ter." He paused to let the meaning of his words sink in.

Nancy thought for a second; then shook her head. "I fail to recall any such incident."

"You have a poor memory," retorted Stanton. "Possibly it will be improved when I show you the despatch in your handwriting."

Nancy's face never altered. "May I see the despatch?"

The Secretary paid no attention to her question. "There is no use denying it any longer, Miss Newton. I know you are a rebel spy."

"Indeed. And may I ask on what grounds you base so serious a charge?"

"No, madam, you may not. That will come out at your trial. I had you brought here that I might find out how you secured the key to our secret cipher code."

Nancy started to reply, when the door opened, and the President, followed by Senator Warren, walked quietly in.

"Good evening, Miss Nancy." The President bowed gravely to her. "Keep your seat. Now, Stanton, what's all this about?" And he threw himself into a vacant chair.

The Secretary, surprised by Lincoln's entrance,

THE LOST DESPATCH

pulled himself together. He was not pleased by the interruption.

"I was examining Miss Newton, Mr. President, as to how she gained possession of the key to our cipher code. Pardon me if I suggest that it would be better to conduct the interview in private." And he glanced significantly at Warren.

"What do you mean by that insinuation, Mr. Secretary?" demanded Warren hotly.

"Now, now," interposed the President patiently. "Nobody has insinuated anything, Warren. It is perfectly proper that the senator be present, Stanton. You forget he is a member of the Military Commission in Congress."

"And I am also here as Miss Newton's legal representative," added Warren warmly, still ruffled by Stanton's manner.

Nancy shot him a grateful glance, but Stanton frowned. He did not like the turn things were taking.

"What is Miss Nancy accused of?" inquired Lincoln.

"Of being a rebel spy."

Lincoln's face grew grave. He inspected Nancy keenly, as his mind flew back to the scene before the deserted house on B Street. It might

NEMESIS

be . . . "And what have you to say to that accusation, Miss Nancy?" he asked sternly.

"I deny it."

"The girl lies," declared Stanton.

Nancy's eyes flashed her indignation, and she turned squarely and faced the Secretary.

"The honorable Secretary," she said, with biting scorn, "has three times announced that I am a rebel spy. Is it not time that he produce evidence to prove that *he* is not lying."

Stanton turned purple with suppressed wrath. To be bearded by a slip of a girl, and before the President! "Blustering will not help your cause," he snarled.

"You have made a serious charge," interrupted Lincoln thoughtfully. "I agree with Miss Nancy, Stanton, that it is time you produce your evidence against her."

The Secretary wheeled on Baker. "Where is Captain Lloyd?"

Lincoln, who was covertly studying Nancy, saw her move ever so slightly and her eyes dilate.

"I sent word to him that I was bringing Miss Newton to see you, instead of taking her to the provost marshal, and to join us here. I think this is he coming now," as the sound of hurrying footsteps sounded outside in the corridor. Baker

THE LOST DESPATCH

stepped to the door, and pulled it open. "Come in, Lloyd."

But the man who entered was not Lloyd. He breathed heavily, as if spent with running, and, despite the cold winter night, beads of perspiration trickled down his face.

"Symonds!" exclaimed Baker. "Did you go for Captain Lloyd, as I ordered?"

Symonds nodded, gazing past Baker with frightened eyes at Nancy.

"Then, why didn't he return here with you?"

"Because"—Symonds took a long breath—"because—he's dead!"

CHAPTER XVI

A TANGLED SKEIN

THE President and his companions sat looking at Symonds in stupefied silence. Secretary Stanton was the first to speak.

"Dead!" he thundered. "Who killed him?"

"I don't know, sir."

"What killed him?"

"I don't know, sir," reiterated Symonds stupidly.

"Was he shot or stabbed?"

"Neither, sir."

"Well, damn my soul!" The exasperated and hot-tempered Secretary clutched the inkstand with the evident intention of hurling it at Symonds. "*What* did he die of?"

"I don't know, sir." Symonds passed a trembling hand over his pale face. "He was just lying there in bed—dead."

"Had Captain Lloyd been ill?" asked the President.

THE LOST DESPATCH

"No, Mr. President; not to my knowledge. He appeared to be in good health and spirits when I left him this afternoon; only exhausted from five days in the saddle. He told me he was going to lie down and rest, and that I was to send for him after I had seen Colonel Baker, who was then in Baltimore, and arranged for this lady's arrest."

"Take that chair, Symonds," said the President, "and tell us all you know of this affair."

Obediently Symonds pulled forward the chair indicated, and faced the President, much perturbed in mind.

"I met Colonel Baker, as Captain Lloyd directed, and gave him the information he had been waiting for. We came here, and, after consulting the Secretary, Colonel Baker ordered me to bring Captain Lloyd to this room.

"When I reached Mrs. Lane's boarding house, I went directly up to the captain's sitting room. I rapped and rapped on his door, but could get no response." Symonds paused impressively, and five pairs of eyes watched him almost without blinking. "The captain had told me he was a heavy sleeper; so, thinking I would have to shake him awake, I tried the door knob. It turned, and I entered. The room was dark except for the

A TANGLED SKEIN

moonlight which came through the front windows.

"I saw that the communicating door leading to the captain's bedroom was open; so I went over to it and called Captain Lloyd's name. Not getting any answer, I walked into the room. It was pitch dark, and the next thing I knew I had tripped and fallen over a body . . ."

"You just stated that you found Captain Lloyd dead in bed," interposed the Secretary sharply.

"And so I did, sir."

"Then, what do you mean by saying you fell over his body on the floor?"

"It wasn't his body, sir."

"Get on, get on!" Stanton glared impatiently at Symonds, who had stopped and was nervously twirling his cap in his fingers. The President was intently watching Nancy, who sat on the edge of her chair listening to Symonds' slow speech with bated breath.

"I picked myself up, sir, considerably shaken, struck a match, found a burner and lighted the gas. Then I leaned over and looked at the man on the floor . . . it was Major Goddard!"

A low cry of terror broke from Nancy. She reeled in her seat. Stanton viewed her emotion

THE LOST DESPATCH

with grim satisfaction. He had found the vulnerable heel of Achilles.

"He wasn't . . . Symonds, don't say it . . ."
Nancy pleaded. "Don't say he was——" Her hands were raised, as if to push some over-mastering horror from her.

"No, no, ma'am; he was only unconscious from a blow on his head." Symonds, shocked by her look of agony, spoke with unusual rapidity.

Nancy bowed her head in her hands; then, realizing that the four men were noting her every movement, she straightened herself and faced them with regained self-control.

"What next, Symonds?" exclaimed Stanton.

"I turned to the bed, and was astounded to see Captain Lloyd sleeping peacefully—at least, I thought so then. I rushed over and shook and shook him. The Lord forgive me! I was so excited over Major Goddard that I never thought, never suspected. I had pushed Captain Lloyd up in bed by that time in my efforts to rouse him. To my unutterable horror, he fell back in my arms a dead weight, and my hand accidentally touched his cold face. I quickly unbuttoned his shirt and placed my ear over his heart, but could detect no action there, nor any pulse when I clutched his wrist.

A TANGLED SKEIN

"It took me a few minutes to collect myself; then I called the landlady, Mrs. Lane. She sent one of her boarders for the provost marshal. When he arrived, I turned the rooms over to him, and came on here to report to the Secretary."

"Did you send for a physician, Symonds?" asked Lincoln.

"Yes, Mr. President. Doctor Ward reached the boarding house a few minutes before the provost marshal. He declared Captain Lloyd had apparently been dead for some hours, and that Major Goddard was unconscious from a blow on the head."

"Did he make an examination as to the cause of Captain Lloyd's death?" inquired Stanton.

"No, Mr. Secretary. He said that the captain was beyond his help, and that Major Goddard needed immediate attention. He dressed the major's wound at once, and then I helped him lift the still unconscious officer onto the other bed."

"Had Major Goddard regained consciousness before you left?"

"No, Mr. Secretary. He had lost a great deal of blood, and Doctor Ward said it might be hours before he came to himself. The doctor

THE LOST DESPATCH

seemed to fear concussion of the brain," he added thoughtfully.

A low sigh escaped Nancy. Only the President noticed her agitation. The other men had forgotten her presence, so absorbed were they in Symonds' story.

"The provost marshal stationed a guard about the house," resumed Symonds, before the Secretary could frame another question. "He placed Mrs. Lane and her whole household under arrest pending an investigation."

"He did right," was Stanton's brief comment. "The affair is certainly mysterious. Did the room look as if there had been a fight?"

"No, Mr. Secretary. There was a good deal of blood collected on the floor about Major Goddard's head; but not even a chair was overturned. When I first reached him, Captain Lloyd lay as if asleep, covered by a bed quilt."

"Strange!" muttered Stanton, and he looked at the President, who sat tilted back in his chair, hands clasped behind his head, gazing through lowered lids at the scene before him. As Lincoln made no comment, and Warren was equally silent, he continued his questions more briskly. "Undoubtedly Major Goddard will satisfactorily explain what took place in the room before Cap-

A TANGLED SKEIN

tain Lloyd's death, and who his assailant was, as soon as he regains consciousness. Now, we have a more pressing matter to attend to to-night." With a wave of his hand, he indicated Nancy. "This afternoon Captain Lloyd showed you a paper, a cipher despatch, written by this young lady . . ."

"I protest," interrupted Nancy vehemently, "against such a base accusation."

". . . taken by him from Major George Pegram, a rebel spy, did he not?" continued Stanton, paying no heed to Nancy.

"Yes, Mr. Secretary; he showed me such a paper," admitted Symonds.

"Did it occur to you, Symonds, to take possession of that paper before it fell into other hands?"

"It did, sir."

"Good. Give it to me." And Stanton stretched out an eager hand.

"I—I—can't, Mr. Secretary," stammered the Secret Service agent. "I searched all the captain's belongings before the provost marshal arrived; but the pocketbook containing the despatch had disappeared."

CHAPTER XVII

IN CLOSE CONFINEMENT

STANTON'S face hardened, and he wheeled on Nancy.

"Where is that paper?" he demanded curtly.

"I do not know."

The Secretary's eyes were the first to fall before the girl's steady gaze.

"I have wasted quite enough time with you," he snapped. "Baker, conduct Miss Newton to Old Capitol Prison, and have her placed in close confinement."

"Wait." Senator Warren rose. "Your pardon, Mr. Secretary; but so far you have produced no direct evidence to prove your charge against Miss Newton. Therefore, I demand her immediate release."

"It is impossible to grant your request. Miss Newton is too dangerous a character to leave at large. She will have an opportunity to prove her

IN CLOSE CONFINEMENT

innocence of the charges against her before a military commission."

"Charges?" said Nancy inquiringly, as she picked up her wrap in obedience to a sign from Baker. "Charges, did you say, Mr. Secretary? Your threats multiply with lightning rapidity."

"Charges, madam," sternly, "as a rebel spy, and, as such, conniving at the death of Captain Lloyd and stealing the paper which proves your guilt."

"It is monstrous!" cried Nancy hotly. "Symonds' own words prove Captain Lloyd died naturally in his bed. As to the paper, I have repeatedly told you I know nothing of it. It may be simply a fabrication of this man's excited imagination. You have only his word against mine that it ever existed."

"Very true, madam; but I prefer to take his word." Stanton's tone of overbearing finality made Nancy clench her hands with rage. She turned appealingly to Lincoln.

"Mr. President, in the name of justice I ask for fair play."

Lincoln unlocked his big, bony hands, brought his chair softly down on its four legs, and rose awkwardly.

"There is much to be explained, Miss Nancy;

THE LOST DESPATCH

and Secretary Stanton is right in the stand he is taking," he said unwillingly. How gladly would he have spoken otherwise! "I cannot interfere." Nancy blanched, and bit her lips to hide their trembling. Nothing escaped the President, and his worn, unlovely face grew tender. "I give you my word, you shall have a fair and impartial trial. Warren, go with Baker and see what you can do to soften Miss Nancy's imprisonment."

"Thanks, Mr. President." But he had turned back to the desk and did not see Nancy's half-extended hand, or hear her faltering voice. Her hand dropped to her side, and, choking back a sob, she followed Senator Warren and Baker out of the room.

Nancy had only a confused idea of what followed: the drive to the provost marshal's office, his questions and cross-questions, the signing of papers, all were but the hazy outlines of some fearful nightmare from which she must soon awake. She was hurried from the provost marshal's and into the carriage again. The rapid hoof beats of the horses kept pace with the pounding of her heart.

"Here we are, Nancy." Warren touched her on the shoulder as their carriage stopped in front of the Old Capitol Prison.

IN CLOSE CONFINEMENT

Baker sprang out, and beckoned to a soldier standing before the doorway. Nancy followed the Secret Service officer more slowly and paused, as the guard gathered about her, to gaze at the twinkling stars and fill her lungs with the cold, fresh air which fanned her hot cheeks.

"Come!" Nancy shuddered involuntarily as Baker's hand closed over her arm in no gentle grip. "This way." And they entered a wide hall.

A number of soldiers lounged on the benches which lined the walls on both sides. Recognizing Baker, they rose, and stood at attention.

"This way, Colonel," said the corporal of the guard. "Superintendent Wood is still in his office." And he preceded them down the hall.

Nancy answered apathetically all the questions the superintendent shot at her.

"Room No. 10, second floor, women's section," said the latter to an orderly, as he closed the register and filed his papers away. "See that clean bedding is taken there at once." The soldier saluted and hastened out of the room. "Now, Miss Newton, follow me." He led her into a smaller apartment where a stout woman and two colored assistants stood waiting. "The matron has to search you. Let me know when

THE LOST DESPATCH

you have finished," he directed, and banged to the door.

Nancy submitted quietly to the ordeal. Her thoughts were elsewhere; she hardly noticed what the others did. She was soon told to put on her clothes, and the matron, leaving her under the watchful eyes of the other women, stepped out of the room. In a few minutes she returned and beckoned Nancy to the door. She found Senator Warren and the superintendent waiting in the hall.

"I sent to your aunt for some necessary clothes for you, Nancy, and the superintendent, here, says they will be brought to you as soon as my messenger returns with them."

"After they have been examined by me," put in Wood gruffly. "Your quarters are in Carrol Prison, where the women are confined."

He pointed up the dirty staircase, and Nancy, preceded by the corporal of the guard, climbed wearily up them, and turned down a long corridor. The corporal stopped before an open door midway down the hall, and signed to her to enter. Senator Warren, who had accompanied her by Wood's permission, stepped forward.

"I must perforce leave you here," he said; then, seeing the hunted look in Nancy's weary

IN CLOSE CONFINEMENT

eyes, he added pityingly: "Don't be so worried, child; keep a brave heart. Your aunt and I will have you out of here in no time."

Nancy turned and impulsively kissed him. "You dear, faithful friend," she murmured brokenly.

"There, there." The senator's own eyes were moist. He thought of his little daughter at home under a watchful mother's care. What if she were in prison, suspected of grave crimes? He patted Nancy's wavy hair with tender hand.

"Senator"—her voice was so low he barely caught her halting words—"won't you get word to me to-morrow without fail about—about——"

"About what, child?"

"About Major Goddard's condition. I—I—must know."

Bravely and unashamed, she looked squarely at Warren. His shrewd eyes softened as he read the story of an untold love in her blushing face.

One second more and the door slammed to; the bolt was shot, and Nancy, with wide, curious eyes, stood gazing at her new surroundings by the aid of a half-burnt candle. The room was small and unspeakably dirty. A wooden cot with its straw mattress stood in the corner farthest from the window; a broken-down wash stand with a tin

THE LOST DESPATCH

basin was in another corner, and a wooden chair without a back occupied the center of the room.

While Nancy was taking stock of her furniture, the door was opened and a bundle of clothes tossed unceremoniously inside. She waited until she heard the door relocked; then took up her belongings, which were well tumbled by the inspection they had undergone. There were some pegs in the walls, and Nancy hung her wrap on one of them; then walked over to the window.

Her room looked out on a court formed by the wings of the buildings. A high platform wide enough for two men to pass each other had been erected on the top of the fence at the back, and she caught the gleam of the moonlight on the sentries' bayonets as it was reflected back by the burnished steel. There was no curtain of any kind in the window. The dirt on the window-panes was her only protection against prying eyes. So Nancy pushed the stool over by the bed, piled her extra clothing on the foot of the bed, and carefully blew out the candle before undressing.

It was a relief to get her clothes off, and she sat on the edge of the bed listening to the sentry's unceasing tramp up and down the corridor. Suddenly the silence was broken by the

IN CLOSE CONFINEMENT

sentry's call from outside: "Post No. 1! Two o'clock, and all's well!"

As the call sounded from post to post, Nancy threw herself face down on the hard mattress.

"Bob, Bob," she moaned, "what evil fortune led you into that room!"

CHAPTER XVIII

WHEN DOCTORS DISAGREE

THE next morning all Washington was agog over the news of Nancy's arrest as a rebel spy, and Captain Lloyd's sudden death. All day long Miss Metoaca's negro butler kept trotting to the front door in answer to the frantic ringing of the bell, and to every anxious inquiry he invariably replied: "Miss Turkey's only tol'able, thank yo', and she begs to be 'scused."

Late in the afternoon Senator Warren walked heavily up the steps. Old Jonas, who had seen him coming along C Street, stood waiting on the threshold, and without a word took his hat and cane.

"Dis way, Marse Senator." He helped him off with his overcoat. "We's been 'spectin' yo' all day, suh."

Miss Metoaca, hollow-eyed and weary, dropped the shawl she was pretending to knit,

WHEN DOCTORS DISAGREE

and rose quickly when she caught sight of Warren.

"What news?" she asked, scanning his face anxiously.

The senator motioned her to resume her seat, and drew up a chair by her. He hesitated perceptibly for a second; then answered her query with another: "Have you seen Nancy?"

"No. I went to the Old Capitol Prison the first thing this morning, and saw Superintendent Wood. He told me I would have to get a permit from the judge advocate general before he could allow me to talk with Nancy. I immediately went to see Judge Holt, and he curtly refused my request. Then I went to the President, who told me he would talk it over with Stanton. I knew what *that* meant; so did not waste any time waiting, but came straight home."

Warren nodded his head gravely. "That is about what I expected. Nancy is in close confinement, charged with the most serious offense possible in war times. I doubt if I, her legal representative, am allowed to see her until this mystery is a little more cleared up.

"Stanton is already wrought up over the fact that the key to his cipher code is known outside of his office. He will move heaven and earth

THE LOST DESPATCH

to discover how Nancy secured the key to the information she is accused of giving to Pegram. She can expect no leniency there. Baker also is determined to prove that she stole the recovered despatch from Lloyd. He insists she is implicated in some way in the captain's mysterious death."

Miss Metoaca drew a long breath. "It looks as if the odds were against Nancy having a fair chance to prove her innocence," she sighed. "Have you any idea when she will be brought to trial?"

"When I saw him just now, Judge Holt was busy selecting officers to serve on a military commission."

"I was told it would be a court-martial."

"Not necessarily." Warren drew out a sheet of paper. "I asked Judge Holt about it, and he gave this copy of the eighty-second article of war, enacted in 1862, which reads: 'All persons, who in time of war, or of rebellion against the supreme authority of the United States, shall be found lurking or acting as spies in or about any of the fortifications, posts, quarters, or encampments of any of the armies of the United States, or elsewhere, shall be triable by a general court-martial, or by a mil-

WHEN DOCTORS DISAGREE

itary commission, and shall, on conviction, suffer death.' "

His voice unconsciously deepened on the last solemn word, and Miss Metoaca's face went gray.

"I wish you men were not so fond of plain language," she exclaimed irritably. "Please remember they have not yet proved anything against Nancy."

"Quite true. But you must also recollect, Miss Metoaca, that a military commission will accept evidence which a civil court would throw out."

"But, Senator, the despatch which Stanton claims Nancy wrote cannot be found. Therefore, it is impossible for them to bring it up as proof against her."

"I am not so sure of that."

"Tut! They have only Symonds' word that such a paper ever existed."

"True; but Symonds is a man whose word can be relied on. His story will be accepted as direct evidence, and it will, I fear, be hard to shake his testimony."

"Have you learned anything that throws light on Captain Lloyd's death?" inquired Miss Metoaca, after a slight pause.

Warren moved his chair nearer the sofa, and glanced about to see that he was not overheard.

THE LOST DESPATCH

"The mystery deepens," he said gravely. "By order of the President, I was allowed to hear the result of the autopsy held this morning."

"What was it?" demanded Miss Metoaca breathlessly.

"After a prolonged and careful examination, the surgeons declare that they could find no wound or mark of violence on Captain Lloyd's body; nor any trace of poison in his system. Therefore, they were forced to believe, in the absence of any particular symptom, or pathological appearance, that he died from some cause, or causes, to them unknown." Warren paused in the rapid reading of his notes in his memorandum book; then resumed dryly: "In my state, the country people would describe Lloyd's death as 'a visitation of God.'"

"Well, Providence might have been worse employed," said Miss Metoaca abruptly, and her face cleared. "Doesn't the autopsy settle that preposterous charge against Nancy?"

"I have not finished telling you all that I heard from the surgeons," went on Warren patiently. "They also said that it was just possible that the last five days in the saddle without sufficient food or sleep might have produced heart failure, but they judged that extremely unlikely——"

WHEN DOCTORS DISAGREE

"I don't call that bad news," broke in Miss Metoaca. "Seems to me that statement clears Nancy absolutely."

"Unfortunately, Doctor Ward contends that the symptoms would be the same if Lloyd had been suffocated by some anæsthetic, chloroform, for instance."

"Suffocated!" ejaculated Miss Metoaca, half rising in her surprise. "What nonsense! They would have detected the smell of chloroform."

"Not necessarily," again returned Warren. "Lloyd had been dead some hours before they found him; secondly, one of the windows was open top and bottom, which ventilated the room. The chloroform probably evaporated quickly, and left no tell-tale odor behind."

"And do you mean to tell me that those idiots believe on such flimsy evidence as that that Nancy killed Lloyd!" exclaimed Miss Metoaca wrathfully. "Do you believe a young, delicate, high-strung girl, like Nancy, could commit such a cold-blooded murder?"

"Nancy's sex will not protect her when the passions of men are roused. Do you suppose that a suspected spy will not be an object of hatred in these days?"

Miss Metoaca nodded sullenly in agreement.

THE LOST DESPATCH

She knew the opprobrium and scorn which were heaped on rebel sympathizers in Baltimore and Washington, and realized the justice of Warren's comment.

"This is not the day of miracles," continued the senator, "and it is stretching probability to the breaking point to believe that Lloyd died from natural causes at the very moment when his death would be of benefit to Nancy. In addition to this, there is the disappearance of that important despatch."

Miss Metoaca made no remark, so Warren resumed his argument.

"The first and most important thing in solving a murder mystery is to find a *motive* for the crime. When that is once established, the means are easy to prove. The thing that will militate the most against Nancy is the *timeliness* of Captain Lloyd's death.

"The military commission will undoubtedly believe that Nancy, realizing that Lloyd could prove she was a rebel spy, resorted to murder to silence the one man whose evidence would hang her. I fear, I greatly fear, Nancy will have a hard time convincing the commission that, if not actually the criminal, she did not connive at Captain Lloyd's death."

WHEN DOCTORS DISAGREE

"It is an outrage!" fumed Miss Metoaca. "I am willing to stake my immortal soul that Nancy had nothing to do with the captain's mysterious death, nor with the disappearance of that miserable despatch."

"My wife and I also believe in Nancy's innocence," declared Warren warmly; "and I give you my solemn word of honor, Miss Metoaca, that I will do everything within my power to assist her."

"God forever bless you!" Miss Metoaca leaned forward, and impulsively clasped his hand in both of hers. "You give me renewed courage. Tell me," as Warren's eyes strayed to the clock on the mantel, "have you heard how Major Goddard is getting on?"

"I stopped at Mrs. Lane's this morning, but the corporal of the provost marshal's guard stationed about the house refused to admit me. Fortunately I met Doctor Ward on his way out from seeing Goddard, and he told me that the major had regained consciousness, but was very weak and unable to talk. I drove at once to the Old Capitol Prison, and induced Wood to promise to tell Nancy that Major Goddard was recovering. I hope the message gave her some comfort, poor girl!"

THE LOST DESPATCH

"Senator," Miss Metoaca lowered her voice until she almost whispered, "Major Goddard and Nancy were thrown together day after day while we were in Winchester. We both felt so sorry for him, and Nancy used to talk or read to him continually during his convalescence. I watched them both, and it gradually dawned on me that the major worshipped the ground Nancy walked on. Now, is it not possible that he overheard Lloyd tell Symonds he had secured a paper which might hang Nancy?"

"Yes," agreed the senator, seeing she paused for a reply.

"Men have thrown worlds away before now to win a woman's love," went on Miss Metoaca so rapidly that her words tumbled over each other. "God knows, I don't want to turn suspicion against an innocent man; but do you not think it possible that Major Goddard . . .?"

"Killed his friend and secured the paper," finished Warren, as she hesitated. "Possible, but not probable."

"Why not?" demanded Miss Metoaca heatedly. "It is more probable than that Nancy should have committed the murder."

"Men have done many mad deeds for love," pursued Warren, paying no attention to her inter-

WHEN DOCTORS DISAGREE

ruption, "but they cannot accomplish the impossible. You think Goddard stepped into that bedroom, chloroformed Lloyd, and then stole the wallet containing that despatch?"

Miss Metoaca nodded her head without speaking.

"How could a blind man do all that and *not* overturn one thing in the room?" asked Warren quietly.

CHAPTER XIX

GROPING IN THE DARK

HOW do you know he didn't?" snapped Miss Metoaca, sticking to her theory with grim determination.

"Because Symonds declares there was no sign of confusion in the room when he found the two men—one dead—one unconscious."

"Always Symonds!" grumbled Miss Metoaca disgustedly. "He is a regular Jack-in-the-box. I don't care what he says. I firmly believe Major Goddard is responsible for Lloyd's death, if he really *was* killed, which I think is open to doubt."

"I thought as you do at first," agreed the senator, "but I found on closer examination that the theory would not hold water. In the first place, Goddard, being blind, had, and has, to feel his way about—probably had to grope around Lloyd's body to locate his face—which would undoubtedly have aroused the sleeping man . . ."

"Wait a bit," interrupted Miss Metoaca. "Even if he did awaken Lloyd, the latter would

GROPING IN THE DARK

have thought nothing of finding his friend by his bedside. They were roommates—and probably, after speaking to Goddard, he rolled over and went to sleep again.

"Then there's another thing," pursued Miss Metoaca eagerly, as Warren nodded a silent agreement to her statement. "Symonds declares Lloyd's wallet was stolen. Why should Nancy take the book when all she needed was the one single paper, which Stanton contends concerned her?"

"Now, Major Goddard is blind. It was impossible for *him* to pick out that paper from others; therefore, he would have been forced to steal the pocketbook."

"That appears plausible," admitted Warren, "but it is *just* as plausible to suppose that Nancy, fearing she would be discovered in Lloyd's room, did not dare to stop and open the pocketbook there, and so took it away with her."

"You seem mighty anxious to believe Nancy took the despatch," commented Miss Metoaca, and disappointment lent bitterness to her voice.

"You mistake me," protested Warren warmly. "I will do my utmost to clear Nancy of these terrible charges; but I fear there is no use trying to prove Goddard guilty. After Symonds dis-

THE LOST DESPATCH

covered the pocketbook was missing, he and Doctor Ward searched Goddard's clothing, as well as the room, but found no trace of the book or the despatch."

"Have you formed any theory as to how Major Goddard came to be lying in the room unconscious?" inquired Miss Metoaca.

"Well." Warren stroked his gray beard thoughtfully. "He may have had an attack of vertigo, or, mind you, this is wild guessing, perhaps he and Lloyd quarreled, and the latter struck him, forgetting his friend's blindness."

"And perhaps the excitement and shock of a quarrel with his best friend brought on Lloyd's attack of heart failure," put in Miss Metoaca excitedly.

"Only time—and Goddard—can tell." Warren shrugged his shoulders as he rose to go. "At present, Miss Metoaca, we are all groping in the dark, but I hope for enlightenment soon."

"When will the military commission hold the trial?" Miss Metoaca followed Warren into the hall.

"As soon as Major Goddard is able to testify. He is one of the most important witnesses. Now, Miss Metoaca, do stop worrying." Warren was shocked by the change in the spinster's worn face,

GROPING IN THE DARK

which he saw more clearly in the light from the open door. "I will let you know the moment something new turns up."

"Be careful how you send news to me," cautioned Miss Metoaca. "This house is under constant surveillance. The Secret Service men were here all the morning, going through Nancy's belongings, and searching the entire house from top to bottom. They even overturned Aunt Betsy's barrel of soft soap. The Lord only knows what they expected to find there. I wished they had done it before they handled my clothes, there would be less dirty finger marks on them." Miss Metoaca snorted with suppressed indignation. "Our wardrobes are simply ruined. Good-bye, Senator Warren; my love to your dear wife. I can never thank you enough for all your kindness." Her lips quivered, and her shrewd old eyes filled with most unwonted tears.

"Please don't," pleaded Warren, much embarrassed. "You and Nancy have warm friends, who will stand by you through thick and thin. You must not get discouraged."

"Discouraged?" echoed Miss Metoaca, winking violently. "When I think of my dear Nancy in that place—I'd—I'd—like to murder some one myself!" And she slammed the front door

THE LOST DESPATCH

viciously as a slight vent to her over-wrought feelings.

About the same hour that Senator Warren and Miss Metoaca were conferring together, Colonel Baker, much dissatisfied in mind, was walking moodily along F Street. Things had not gone to suit him that day. The result of the autopsy had puzzled him; the search of Miss Metoaca's house had proved disappointing, for nothing had been found there that in any way touched on the supposed murder, or on the whereabouts of the missing and all-important despatch. As he crossed the street on his way to the Ebbitt House, he encountered Symonds hurrying out of the F Street entrance of the hotel.

"Well, Symonds, what news?" he asked briefly, returning the other's salute.

"I hear that Major Goddard has regained consciousness, Colonel."

"Good!" Baker hesitated a moment; then turned on his heel. "Come with me, Symonds." And he led the way to Mrs. Lane's. The sentry on duty before the house saluted as he recognized him, and allowed him to enter the dwelling.

Baker wasted no time downstairs, but went directly to Lloyd's sitting room, and rapped softly

GROPING IN THE DARK

on the door. In response to his knock, a nurse appeared in the doorway.

"What is it?" she asked.

"I have come to see your patient, Major Goddard, who I am told has regained consciousness."

"Oh, that is impossible," exclaimed the nurse, and she made a movement to close the door.

"One moment!"—sternly—"I am Colonel Baker, of the Secret Service. It is imperative that I see Major Goddard at once. I will not stay long." And he edged toward the doorway.

The young nurse had but recently joined the United States Sanitary Commission, and she was overawed by Baker's authoritative manner.

"Doctor Ward has forbidden . . . still," she murmured, "if you will stay but a few minutes . . . " She moved reluctantly aside, and Baker stepped into the room, followed by Symonds.

"Don't worry," said the colonel kindly. "I will explain my presence to Doctor Ward; you will not be blamed. Where is your patient?"

"In the next room. He has been asleep all the afternoon, but is awake now."

With noiseless steps Colonel Baker made his way into the next room, and drew up a chair by Goddard's bedside. Nothing had been disturbed in the room; the furniture had been left as it was

THE LOST DESPATCH

before Lloyd's death. A feeble attempt had been made to remove the blood stains in front of the mantel; but the servant had only succeeded in spreading the stains over the rag carpet.

Goddard moved restlessly, and turned over in bed, so that he faced Baker; his quick ear had caught the slight sound the newcomer made in seating himself.

"Nurse, is it you?" His voice was scarcely more than a whisper.

"No, Major Goddard; it is I, Colonel Baker."

"Baker?" Goddard spoke half to himself.

"Baker? Not Colonel Baker, of the Secret Service?" attempting to rise in bed.

"The same, sir, but that need not excite you. Here, let me put this pillow at your back; you might then be more comfortable." Baker leaned over, and lifted Goddard up in his strong arms as Symonds slipped the pillow in place.

"Thanks. Who is the other person in the room?" inquired Goddard weakly.

"Symonds."

"Symonds!" Goddard's eyelids fluttered over his sightless eyes. Baker did not care to break the pause that followed. Suddenly Goddard roused himself. "What can I do for you, Colonel?"

GROPING IN THE DARK

"Just answer a few questions as to what happened here yesterday afternoon. I won't keep you talking long."

"I—I—am not very strong," faltered Goddard faintly.

"You had a nasty fall," sympathized Baker, "and lost a lot of blood before Symonds found you."

"Found me! Where?"

"Right on this floor, sir," volunteered Symonds. "You gave me an awful turn, sir; for you looked more dead than . . ."—he stopped abruptly as he met Baker's warning glare . . . "alive," he supplemented feebly.

At that moment the nurse came in from the sitting room and touched Baker on the shoulder. "You must go at once," she whispered. "You are staying too long. Major Goddard must not be excited."

"In a second, nurse." Baker waved her impatiently away, and turned again to Goddard. "Had you and Captain Lloyd been talking long before you fell?"

After a prolonged pause came the whisper: "I—I—cannot remember."

Nothing daunted, the Secret Service officer pursued his examination.

THE LOST DESPATCH

"Did Captain Lloyd tell you that an important despatch, *proving* Miss Nancy Newton a rebel spy, had been stolen from him by her?"

Goddard was so long in answering that Baker glanced anxiously at the silent figure on the bed. Goddard's face matched the whiteness of the pillow case. He must have felt the scrutiny of Baker's searching eyes, for he moved slightly. Again came the same whisper: "I—I—cannot remember."

"Now, see here." Baker's voice rose.

Goddard held up a shaking hand. "Wait, Colonel," he stammered. "You forget I am ill—faint—perhaps later—" He paused for breath. "Instead of coming to me, why don't you ask Captain Lloyd?"

"For the very good reason that Lloyd is dead," returned Baker solemnly.

"Dead!" Goddard half rose; then sank back on his pillows, panting from his exertions.

"Yes, dead," went on Baker, watching him closely. "Brutally murdered last evening." He paused.

"Where?" Goddard's white lips formed the question; the whispered word could hardly be heard.

"Here in this room while lying on his bed.

GROPING IN THE DARK

Now, Major Goddard, I insist upon knowing . . .” He spoke to deaf ears; Goddard had fainted away.

A firm hand descended on Baker’s shoulder, and swung him about face.

“What in hell do you mean by browbeating my nurse and forcing yourself in here!” exclaimed Doctor Ward hotly. “Good God! What have you done to Goddard!” He had caught sight of the latter’s ghastly face. “Nurse, look to your patient! Now, sir, out with you.” He pushed Baker in the direction of the door. “And you go, too, Symonds,” as the man rose and stood uncertain whether or not to assist Colonel Baker in his efforts to remain in the room.

“I have a perfect right to come here,” stormed Baker, bracing his thick-set figure against the door jamb. “I am investigating Captain Lloyd’s murder, and came here to get Major Goddard’s testimony. You forget, Doctor, I am the head of the Secret Service of this city.”

“I don’t care a damn who you are,” roared Ward, much incensed. “In managing a sick room, I take my orders from no one. Major Goddard was in no condition to be interviewed. I have carefully kept all sensational news from him. By your crass stupidity you have probably

THE LOST DESPATCH

brought on a relapse. When he is able he will give his testimony before a court composed of his superior officers and to no one else. Now, go!" And he closed the door in Baker's indignant face.

CHAPTER XX

THE TURNING POINT

DOCTOR WARD'S fears for his patient's condition were well founded. The shock of his interview with Baker in his weakened condition brought on an attack of brain fever, and for days Goddard's life hung in the balance. An experienced Sister of Mercy replaced the young nurse from the United States Sanitary Commission; and at Doctor Ward's earnest request the provost marshal stationed a sentry at Goddard's door with orders to admit no one to the sick room except by the doctor's express permission. Anxious days followed, the doctor and the nurse grimly contesting each step of the way as Goddard sank nearer and nearer the Valley of the Shadow.

Ward bent over the bed, and anxiously scanned Goddard's bloodless face; then rose and tiptoed softly about the room. He was weary from his long vigil by the bedside; it was a relief to stretch his cramped limbs while he waited for the crisis to pass.

THE LOST DESPATCH

"Have you heard anything more about the arrangements for Miss Newton's trial?" asked Sister Angelica softly.

"No, except that the hearing has been again postponed."

"I cannot believe the charges against Miss Newton," murmured the sister. "I have seen her frequently at the hospitals when she came to read to the convalescents and bring them pickles."

"Pickles?"

"Yes, sir. The soldiers prefer them to many luxuries. I have seen Miss Newton do many kind and generous acts. It is incredible that she should have planned and carried out so deliberate and cold-blooded a murder."

"Judge Holt asked me to-day—" The doctor's hurried whisper was interrupted by a sound from the bed, and he hurried to his patient.

Goddard lay on his back, gazing with unseeing eyes at the ceiling, one thin arm tossed across the pillow. "Nancy," he whispered; "Nancy!"

"He is always calling her name," murmured Sister Angelica. "Poor fellow—poor girl!"

"Aye," muttered Ward under his breath. "God help them both—one here and one in prison!"

"Nancy." Goddard's weak voice seemed to

THE TURNING POINT

gain in strength. "Don't cry, dear. I am coming." A feeble smile lighted his face; he turned slightly, his eyes closed, and, with a sigh like a tired child, he slept.

Ward's hand sought Goddard's pulse. He touched the white cheek. The skin was cool and moist. Turning to the nurse, his eyes dancing with delight, he whispered: "The fever is broken. At last Major Goddard is sleeping naturally."

Sister Angelica's fervid "Thank God!" was lost in the folds of the sash curtain as she pulled up the shade and let the daylight enter the sick room.

The days passed on leaden feet for Nancy. The suspense and close confinement told even on her splendid constitution, and she grew but a shadow of her former self. The prison food was not inviting; only when pangs of hunger forced her could she swallow the unappetizing half-cooked meats and sour bread which were brought to her on a tin plate by a slatternly negress.

Occasionally the superintendent sent her word of Robert Goddard's condition, but that was all she heard from the outside world. The negress,

THE LOST DESPATCH

who tidied her room and brought her meals, had received orders not to speak to the prisoner, and the soldiers on guard at the prison were, with few exceptions, Germans, who did not understand or speak much English. Sometimes Nancy actually ached to hear the sound of friendly voices. The only break in the daily monotony was the nine-o'clock inspection of prisoners, which occurred each morning, as well as at night. Nancy spent most of her days standing near the window and gazing with wistful eyes at the other prisoners, who were allowed fresh-air exercise in the courtyard under the watchful eyes of the sentries.

The horrors of the long, sleepless nights were added to by the presence of rats, who scampered noisily back and forth across the bare floor. Nancy had discovered one on her bed the second night of her imprisonment, and her screams brought the guard on the double quick.

"Vat ess de drouble?" he demanded, dashing open the door. He leveled his Springfield full at the girl, and she heard the click of the hammer. Another soldier came in, carrying a lantern, and Nancy, huddled in one corner of her cot, hastily drew the bedclothes about her.

"Rats. Look!" And she pointed to a gray

THE TURNING POINT

body disappearing down a hole in one of the corners of the room.

"Ah, Himmell! Dey ess all ober," remarked the guard stolidly, as he lowered his rifle. "Dere ess no use to holler. We can do nuddings."

"Do you mean to say I have to lie here while those vile creatures run over me?" exclaimed Nancy wrathfully.

"Ya."

"Go tell Superintendent Wood I wish to see him at once," imperiously.

"Nein," both soldiers spoke at once.

"And you call yourselves men!" ejaculated Nancy scornfully.

"We fight mit Siegel for de Union," retorted the sentry, retreating to the hall, "and not mit rats." He shut the door and shot the bolt in place. Nancy was once again in solitary confinement.

To Miss Metoaca and Senator Warren the days fled by all too quickly. Try as they did, they could find no evidence, no clue that would benefit Nancy, or prove another guilty of the crime she was charged with. Secretary Stanton was deaf to all appeals that Nancy's captivity be lightened, and that her aunt be permitted to see her.

THE LOST DESPATCH

"Treason must be, shall be, punished," he declared. "Miss Newton will be given an opportunity to clear herself of the charges against her before a military commission. Until then she must remain in solitary confinement."

Miss Metoaca refused to be cast down by her rebuffs, and doggedly persisted in her efforts to obtain Nancy's freedom. She took no part in the city's mad rejoicing over the fall of Richmond; she was too sick at heart over her niece's threatened fate.

On the afternoon of the eighth of April she was taking off her wraps in her own room in a thoroughly discouraged frame of mind. She had just called on Doctor Ward, who had courteously but firmly refused to allow her to see Goddard.

"What is it, Jonas?" she demanded crossly, in answer to a timid knock on her door.

"Mrs. Arnold an' Mrs. Bennett am down in de pawler, Miss Turkey." No negro had ever been able to pronounce Miss Metoaca's name, and she had been accustomed from childhood to being called "Miss Turkey" by her domestics. "Dey done seed yo' come home, an' I'se jes' 'bliged ter show dem in."

Miss Metoaca considered for a moment. Nancy had confided her suspicions in regard to

THE TURNING POINT

Mrs. Bennett to her aunt in February. Should she receive her now? She had called repeatedly since Nancy's arrest, but Miss Metoaca had always excused herself. This time she was inside the house, perhaps already spying around. Miss Metoaca came to a sudden resolution. "Tell the ladies I will be right down," she called to the waiting servant, and, true to her words, she joined them without further loss of time.

"My dear Miss Metoaca," began Mrs. Arnold pompously, but the look in the spinster's red eyes went straight to her heart, and she threw her arms impulsively about her in a warm embrace without completing her sentence.

"It is good of you to come," said Miss Metoaca, touched by Mrs. Arnold's greeting. "I—I—was feeling very downhearted."

"And no wonder," purred Mrs. Bennett, wiping her eyes with a dainty handkerchief. "You have borne a great deal, Miss Metoaca, and have our deepest sympathy."

"You crocodile," thought the spinster, as she said aloud: "It is cruel, cruel! Nancy never committed that crime, *never*."

Mrs. Arnold and her friend exchanged doubtful glances.

"Have you been allowed to see your niece?"

THE LOST DESPATCH

inquired the latter, as Mrs. Arnold seemed at a loss for words.

"No; and I am convinced the food and clothes I send her never get past the inspector's office."

"Have you appealed to the President?"

"Have I?" Miss Metoaca's tone was eloquent. "I have tormented that poor man nearly to death."

"Did he give you no comfort?" asked Mrs. Arnold. "Usually President Lincoln is only too anxious to sign pardons."

"He doesn't seem to be in this instance," dryly. "He insists that an open trial will be the best thing for Nancy. 'Murder is evil,' he said; 'evil cannot stand discussion. The more the mystery is discussed the quicker you will discover clues leading to the murderer. What kills the skunk is the publicity it gives itself. What a skunk wants to do is to keep snug under the barn—in the daytime—when men are around with shotguns.'"

"Is Sam working for you now?" inquired Mrs. Arnold, after a slight pause.

"Sam!" echoed Miss Metoaca, her surprise causing her to raise her voice.

Seeing Mrs. Arnold was flurried by the apparent effect of her innocent remark on Miss Metoaca, Mrs. Bennett answered for her.

THE TURNING POINT

"My husband and I met Nancy conversing with the negro Sam, about six o'clock on the afternoon that Captain Lloyd—ah—died." Miss Metoaca was intently studying the speaker's face, but she could learn nothing from the innocent blue eyes raised so confidently to hers. "Nancy told us then that Sam, who has often waited on me, was anxious to secure a place in a private family . . ."

"And so," broke in Mrs. Arnold, "as I am in need of another man-servant, I came to inquire about Sam."

"Now that is too bad," exclaimed Miss Metoaca, rallying her wits to her aid. "I wish I had known before that you needed a servant, Mrs. Arnold. Sam came to me and asked me to find him a place, so I sent him over to my cousin, Mrs. Hillen, in Baltimore, as she wanted a good butler." Her tranquil manner effectually covered a rapidly beating heart. How much did Mrs. Bennett know about Sam, and where had she gained her information?

"Great heavens! What is that?" exclaimed Mrs. Bennett, startled out of her usual calm as a long-drawn howl came from the back of the house.

"It's Misery. Poor dog! He is grieving his

THE LOST DESPATCH

heart out for Nancy. I suspect Jonas has forgotten and shut him in the pantry." Miss Metoaca made a motion to rise.

"Sit still, dear." Mrs. Bennett detained her by a gesture. "I will go and release Misery." And before the perturbed spinster could stop her she had tripped gracefully out of the room.

"Here is Senator Warren," remarked Mrs. Arnold, catching sight of him through the window as he came up the steps; and Miss Metoaca, all else forgotten, hastened to the front door.

As Warren greeted her, the shrill voices of newsboys shouting "Extra!" "Extra!" sounded down the street, and, with a muttered word of apology, he waited on the steps until a newsboy saw his beckoning hand and rushed up with the paper. Miss Metoaca and Mrs. Arnold, who had joined her, read the flaring headlines over Warren's shoulder:

STIRRING NEWS FROM THE FRONT!

LEE OVERWHELMED!

GRANT CRUSHING HIM ON THE EAST!!

SHERIDAN ON THE WEST!!!

Warren raised his hat reverently. "The end is in sight! Thank God! Thank God!"

THE TURNING POINT

"Oh, I *do* thank God! This cruel war!" Miss Metoaca choked, and turned to Mrs. Arnold, who was weeping softly. "Let us go inside." And she led the way into the hall, where Warren detained her.

"I only came to tell you that the military commission meets day after to-morrow, the tenth, to try Nancy."

Miss Metoaca drew a long breath. "Anything is better than this suspense."

Warren nodded understandingly. "I am to see Nancy to-morrow. The judge advocate has furnished me with a copy of the charges. Did Ward allow you to talk with Goddard?"

"No."

"How strange!" exclaimed Mrs. Bennett, who had rejoined them, dropping the extra which she and Mrs. Arnold were busy reading. "I hear the major is almost well again. Do you know," warming to the subject, "I consider Doctor Ward is acting very mysteriously in regard to Major Goddard's condition."

"Indeed? In what way, Mrs. Bennett?" Warren pricked up his ears.

"By his persistent refusals to let anyone into Major Goddard's sick room. And I am not the only one who thinks so." She paused impres-

THE LOST DESPATCH

sively, then went on: "Colonel Baker told me that he was convinced the last time he talked with Major Goddard that he had regained his sight."

"Is that so?" Warren looked his disbelief. "I will inquire into it. Good night, Miss Metoaca; I must be running along."

"And we have to go, too," declared Mrs. Arnold. "Don't be discouraged, dear Miss Metoaca." And she gave the spinster an encouraging pat on her shoulder.

"Don't allow your mind to dwell too much on your worries," advised Mrs. Bennett soothingly, as she followed the senator down the steps.

Miss Metoaca nodded a smiling farewell, but when the door was safely shut the smile faded, and instead her face looked pinched and drawn. Deep in thought she hastened to the morning room, which was back of the dining room, and sat down at her desk to scribble a line to her cousin, Mrs. Hillen.

To a casual eye the desk was as she had left it two hours before. But Miss Metoaca had a well-developed bump of order, the terror of her servants, and nothing escaped her eagle eye. One glance showed her the desk ornaments had been moved. Dropping her pen, Miss Metoaca

THE TURNING POINT

opened several of the drawers. One look was enough to show her that their contents had been disturbed. Every paper was tossed and tumbled.

Feverishly Miss Metoaca went through the remaining drawers. Apparently nothing had been removed. Just as she was drawing a long breath of relief, her hand touched a note book concealed under a mass of papers at the back of the bottom drawer. Pulling it out, Miss Metoaca found that the book was one used by Nancy to keep the marketing accounts and other memoranda. She turned the pages hastily—five sheets had been torn out! The book fell unheeded on the floor, as Miss Metoaca bowed her head in her trembling hands.

CHAPTER XXI

THE TRIAL

ON the morning of the tenth, Senator Warren had difficulty in reaching the office building on Fourteenth Street, where Nancy's trial was to be held. The official news of Lee's surrender had just been received at the Capitol, and the streets were jammed with excited, cheering crowds. Despite the drizzling rain, groups of citizens paraded, singing "Old Hundred" with more fervor than harmony, and military bands added their din to the confusion. As far as the eye could see, flags and gay bunting waved from every public building and residence.

As Warren pushed his way through a crowd of negroes, who were almost delirious with joy, he heard the boom of the distant guns in the fortifications about Washington firing the two hundred salutes ordered by Secretary Stanton. On entering the long room assigned for the use of

THE TRIAL

the court, he found the members of the military commission had assembled. Warren already knew Colonel Andrews, who, by the seniority of his rank, was the president of the commission, and they exchanged a few words of greeting. The colonel beckoned to a tall, bearded officer standing by the door to approach.

"Senator Warren, let me introduce Captain Foster, the judge advocate."

The two men examined each other covertly and with keen interest; they both realized the gravity of the struggle before them—a young girl's life hung in the balance—as they gravely shook hands.

"If you are ready, Mr. Senator, we will call the court to order, as we are already very late, having been detained by the celebration of Lee's surrender," said Foster courteously. "The necessary witnesses are in the next room, and the sergeant tells me the prisoner is downstairs under guard."

At that moment a young man came into the room, and, seeing Warren, strode over to him.

"Good morning, Dwight," said the senator. "Colonel Andrews—Captain Foster—this is my colleague, Mr. Dwight, a member of the Washington Bar, who will assist me in my defence of

THE LOST DESPATCH

Miss Newton. I am quite ready to commence at once, Captain Foster."

In the meantime the seats provided for the spectators in the back of the room were being rapidly filled. Both Miss Metoaca and Nancy were very popular in Washington society, and all their friends and relatives who could procure cards of admission from the authorities had arrived early so as not to miss any of the proceedings.

A long table with writing materials on it had been provided for the use of the members of the court, and a smaller one for Nancy and her counsel was placed near it. Facing the two tables was a chair for the witnesses, and beyond that another small table for the use of the reporters.

The officers, who wore their full-dress uniforms and side arms, were soon seated about the table, with the presiding officer, Colonel Andrews, at the head, and the judge advocate, Captain Foster, in undress uniform, facing him at the foot. At a signal from the judge advocate, one of the orderlies in attendance stepped to the door and spoke to the sentry.

In a few minutes, Nancy was ushered into the room by the provost sergeant of the guard. Warren rose instantly, and escorted her to her seat,

THE TRIAL

and his eyes flashed in admiration of her poise and beauty.

Tranquilly and with dignity, she returned the salutes of the officers; if she had been receiving them in her own drawing-room, her manner could not have been more composed.

Mrs. Warren, who sat between Mrs. Arnold and Mrs. Bennett, noticed with pitying heart the deep shadows under Nancy's eyes and the hollows in her white cheeks. She bent forward, and impulsively kissed her hand to Nancy when the latter looked wistfully at her, and was promptly rebuked by the presiding officer. Nancy had hoped that her aunt would be present, but Warren had decided to call Miss Metoaca as one of the witnesses for the defence, and therefore she could not attend the hearings.

The judge advocate rapped for order; then rose and signed to Nancy to do likewise as he read from a paper in his hand:

"Special Orders	}	"War Department,
"No. 576		"Office of the Adjutant-General.
		"April 8th, 1865.

"4 . . . A Military Commission is appointed to meet in the City of Washington, District of Columbia, at nine o'clock on Monday, April 10th, 1865, for the trial of Miss Nancy Newton.

THE LOST DESPATCH

Detail for the Commission

Colonel Andrews.....U. S. Volunteers

Major Charles Lane.....U. S. Veterans Reserve Corps

Captain John Taylor.....1st Squadron Provisional
Cavalry

Lieutenant Joseph Clarke. 1st Mass. Heavy Artillery

Lieutenant Henry Wells..1st N. H. Heavy Artillery

Lieutenant Harvey Slocum. 3rd Mass. Heavy Artillery

Lieutenant James Phillipse. 2nd District Volunteer
Cavalry

Captain George Foster...—th U. S. Infantry, Judge
Advocate and Recorder.

"A greater number of officers cannot be assembled
without manifest injury to the service at this time.

"By command of the President.

"E. D. TOWNSEND,

"Assistant Adjutant-General."

"Prisoner," the judge advocate turned and
faced her directly, "do you object to being tried
by any member of this commission?"

"No, sir," answered Nancy calmly.

The officers all rose and stood, while the judge
advocate went through the long ceremony of
swearing in the court and then the reporter.
Colonel Andrews in turn administered the oath
to the judge advocate. After the officers had
resumed their seats there was a slight pause while
the judge advocate searched among his papers.

THE TRIAL

Finding what he wanted, he again faced Nancy, who had remained standing, and read in a voice that was clearly heard through the room:

Charges and specifications against the prisoner, Miss Nancy Newton.

Charge 1st.—Violation of the 82nd Article of War:

Specification.—In this that the said Nancy Newton on or about the 23rd day of February, 1865, was found acting as a rebel spy in or near Winchester, Va., the Headquarters of the U. S. Middle Military Division, Major-General Sheridan commanding.

GEORGE LLOYD,

Captain, U. S. Secret Service,

Officer Preferring Charges.

Charge 2nd.—Murder in violation of the 58th Article of War:

Specification.—In that the said Nancy Newton, being in fear of arrest within our lines as a spy by order of the said Captain Lloyd, who had secured proof of her guilt, did, feloniously and with malice aforethought, kill the said Captain Lloyd on Monday, the 6th day of March, 1865."

"Prisoner, what say you to these charges and specifications?"

"Not guilty, sir," Nancy answered, without a tremor, and she reseated herself by Warren's side.

Symonds was the first witness called. After

THE LOST DESPATCH

he had been duly sworn, the judge advocate began his direct examination.

"Your name and occupation?"

"John Symonds, serving as United States Secret Service agent under Colonel Lafayette C. Baker."

"How long have you been in that service?"

"I have been with Colonel Baker ever since the Bureau was first established."

"Do you recognize the accused?"

"I do, sir." Symonds glanced hastily at Nancy, then averted his eyes.

"State under what circumstances you have known her?"

"Captain Lloyd, my superior officer, had reason to believe that Miss Newton was a rebel spy, and I was detailed to watch her movements."

"Do you know what first led Captain Lloyd to suspect the accused?"

"Yes, sir. On the twenty-seventh of December, 1864, I accompanied the captain to Poolesville. While on our way there we met a Federal cavalryman riding toward Washington, who said he carried despatches to Adjutant General Thomas. When Captain Lloyd demanded to see the despatch, the supposed trooper managed to make his escape, after first knocking

THE TRIAL

the captain senseless from his horse. As he dashed up the road, his horse swerved toward the woods skirting the road, and a low-hanging branch knocked his hat off, and I discovered the rider was a woman."

A low murmur of surprise from the spectators interrupted Symonds, and the president rapped on the table with his sword hilt. "Those present must be silent," he announced, "or the room will be cleared."

"What led you to think the rider was a woman in disguise?" asked the judge advocate, after silence had been restored.

"By the long hair which fell down her back below her waist."

"You say she escaped. How did that happen?"

"Her horse was fresh, mine lame, and the captain's worn out. It was impossible for me to overtake her. I soon gave up the chase discouraged, and returned to Captain Lloyd, whom I found lying senseless where he had fallen. I rode to Poolesville, procured a horse and wagon, and brought Captain Lloyd back to this city. But before doing so I picked up the spy's hat, and on examining it found a number of hairs sticking to the inside. They were of a peculiar color."

THE LOST DESPATCH

He glanced significantly at Nancy. "Captain Lloyd and I both agreed that they exactly matched Miss Newton's hair."

"Produce the hairs," ordered the judge advocate.

"I can't, sir," reluctantly. "I gave them to Captain Lloyd, and I don't know what he did with them."

The judge advocate, who had entered all questions and answers in the book before him, paused and gazed blankly at Symonds for a moment; then resumed his examination.

"When did you last see Captain Lloyd?"

"On the afternoon of Monday, the sixth of last March. He had just returned from Winchester."

"Did he speak of the accused?"

"He did, sir."

"In what way?"

"He told me," Symonds cleared his throat, and spoke impressively, "that he had absolute proof that Miss Newton was a rebel spy."

"Did he make that statement in the privacy of his room, or in the public hall?"

"In the hall, sir."

"In a voice that could be overheard?"

"Yes, sir."

THE TRIAL

"Did Captain Lloyd state what that proof was while you were in the hall?"

"No, sir; but he *did* tap his chest and said he had it there."

"Did you see anyone in the hall?"

"No, sir; the hall where we stood was empty except for the captain and myself."

"In your opinion, did Captain Lloyd speak loudly enough to be overheard by persons on the floors above or below where you were standing?"

Warren started to his feet. "I object to that question."

"Objection not sustained," ruled the president. "The question is relevant. Continue, Mr. Judge Advocate."

"Answer my last question, Symonds," directed the judge advocate.

"In my opinion, he could easily have been overheard," declared Symonds positively.

"When Captain Lloyd told you in the hall that he had absolute proof that the accused was a rebel spy, did he mention her by name?"

"No, sir."

"Did he speak of this spy in such a way that *anyone* would know to whom he alluded?"

Symonds reflected for a moment. "No, sir; he did not," he answered finally.

THE LOST DESPATCH

"Did you go with Captain Lloyd into his sitting room?"

"Yes, sir."

"State to the court what occurred then."

"Captain Lloyd showed me a despatch which he had taken from the dead body of a rebel officer, Major George Pegram. The captain declared this despatch was given to Pegram by the accused; that she understood the Morse code, and had taken the message verbatim from the wire, having been in the telegraph office at the time it was received."

"Have you that despatch, Symonds?"

"No, sir. I handed it back to Captain Lloyd."

"What did he do with it?"

"He replaced it in his wallet, and put that in the inside pocket of his coat."

"Can you recollect the words of the despatch?"

"No, sir; I cannot. It was in cipher, and the words made no sense that I could understand; secondly, I only saw it for a second."

"Would you recognize the handwriting if you saw it again?"

"I think I would, sir," but Symonds looked dubious.

The judge advocate picked up several sheets

THE TRIAL

of paper, apparently torn from a notebook, and handed them to the Secret Service agent.

"Did the writing of the despatch resemble any of these specimens of the prisoner's handwriting?" he asked.

Symonds studied the papers intently; then shook his head. "No, sir."

Mrs. Bennett, who had bent forward, the better to hear Symonds' answer, sank slowly back in her chair. The judge advocate's manifest surprise was reflected in her face. She paid no attention to his next question; her busy brain was occupied in planning to get instant word to Colonel Baker that, in her opinion, Symonds was deliberately lying to shield Nancy.

"State to the court as briefly as possible what occurred after you returned the despatch to Captain Lloyd," ordered the judge advocate.

"The captain told me to report to Colonel Baker that he possessed new evidence, which would hang Miss Newton. He said I was to explain to Colonel Baker that he had been five days in the saddle and was exhausted from lack of sleep, and that he was obliged to rest that afternoon, as he could not keep awake any longer, or words to that effect."

"One moment," interrupted the judge advo-

THE LOST DESPATCH

cate. "Did all this conversation take place in Captain Lloyd's room, and was the hall door closed?"

Symonds considered a second before replying. "The door was closed during our interview in the room," he said thoughtfully, "but I distinctly recollect he told me, *after* I had stepped into the hall, that he was going to lie down and that I was to be sure and send for him when the accused was arrested because he 'would sleep like the dead.' "

Nancy stole an anxious glance at Warren's impassive face, for the effect of Symonds' testimony on the court was only too apparent; but the senator was staring steadily at the witness and paid no attention to his client. She sank back in her chair with a deep sigh.

"Do you think these last remarks of Captain Lloyd could have been overheard?"

"Yes, sir. The captain did not trouble to lower his voice."

"Did you obey the captain's orders, Symonds?"

"I did, sir. I met Colonel Baker on his return from Baltimore. After consulting with the Secretary of War, he sent me to tell Captain Lloyd to join him at the War Department."

THE TRIAL

"Describe what took place when you reached Captain Lloyd's room that night," directed the judge advocate; and Symonds gave a dramatic account of the discovery of Lloyd's dead body and Goddard's unconscious form. When he had finished, the judge advocate continued his questions.

"Were any chairs or tables overturned in the room, as if there had been a fight?"

"No, sir; not one."

"You say Captain Lloyd was apparently sleeping naturally in bed. Explain your meaning a little more clearly."

"Why, sir, he was lying there on his side covered by a bed quilt. Anyone would have thought, as I did, that he was still asleep."

"Did you send for a doctor?"

"I did, sir. Doctor Ward arrived a few moments before the provost marshal."

"Did you search for the important despatch?"

"I did, sir; but without finding a trace of either the pocketbook or the despatch."

"Where did you find the coat Captain Lloyd had worn that afternoon?"

"Hanging on the back of the chair by his bed."

"What did you do when the provost marshal arrived?"

THE LOST DESPATCH

"I turned the rooms over to him, left Doctor Ward in charge of Major Goddard, and hastened to the War Department to report to the Secretary of War."

The judge advocate walked over and conferred with Colonel Andrews; then turned back and addressed Warren courteously.

"I have finished, Mr. Senator. Do you wish to cross-examine the witness?"

Warren nodded in the affirmative, glanced over his notes, then handed a slip of paper to the judge advocate, who read the question aloud as he pasted it in the book in front of him.

"What proof have you, beyond Captain Lloyd's word, that he *took* that despatch from the dead confederate, Major Pegram?"

"None, sir," exclaimed Symonds, much astonished.

"Would you question a dead man's word, Mr. Senator?" inquired the judge advocate sharply.

"I would, sir," declared Warren firmly. He rose and faced Colonel Andrews. "I respectfully submit to this court that I seriously object to the introduction of hearsay evidence."

"And I contend, sir," exclaimed the judge advocate, "that Symonds' testimony is direct evi-

THE TRIAL

dence. He saw the despatch in Captain Lloyd's hand."

"You are right there, sir," said Warren courteously. "But Symonds *did not see* Captain Lloyd take that despatch from the dead body of the Confederate. He believes that that paper was taken from Major Pegram only because Captain Lloyd *told him so*—and *that*, sir, is hearsay evidence. And I demand in justice to my client, whose life hangs in the balance, that hearsay evidence be not accepted in this trial."

Major Lane hastily scribbled a few lines, and handed the paper to the judge advocate, who immediately read the question aloud:

"What induces you to think, Mr. Senator, that Captain Lloyd, a man of integrity and standing, would manufacture evidence against the accused?"

"Because of his known animosity toward her," was the prompt reply, "in proof of which I have direct evidence to offer to this court."

The judge advocate, however, stuck to his argument, and a quick war of words followed, during which Colonel Andrews bent forward and consulted Major Lane in an undertone; then came the brief order: "Clear the court." Warren and the judge advocate ushered Nancy into a

THE LOST DESPATCH

small vacant room, while the spectators were bundled unceremoniously into the hall.

The fresh air in the hall was a relief after the stuffy atmosphere of the courtroom. Mrs. Warren and her two friends pushed their way to the end window, opened it, and leaned out, the better to cool their flushed faces.

"I fear, I greatly fear, Nancy is very deeply involved in this mysterious tragedy," murmured Mrs. Bennett, so that she would not be overheard by others in the crowd.

"It looks that way," agreed Mrs. Warren sadly. "Still, I firmly believe in her innocence. If the court refuses hearsay evidence, they cannot then prove that Nancy had a motive for killing Captain Lloyd."

"My husband declares that a military court is the fairest and most impartial tribunal in the world," pursued Mrs. Bennett. "Hark! What is that music?" A band, preceding its regiment, had wheeled into Fourteenth Street, some blocks below, and was marching toward them. The strains of music, at first faint, grew louder in volume. "It is—yes—it is 'Dixie'!"

"It's the first time in four years that that tune has been heard in the nation's capital," declared Mrs. Warren excitedly.

THE TRIAL

"President Lincoln has just said we captured it along with Richmond, and that 'Dixie' is national to-day," laughed a staff officer, who had just entered the building. "Is the hearing over for this afternoon, ladies?"

"I wish it was," sighed Mrs. Arnold. "We dine at four, and . . ."

Her words were interrupted by the opening of the folding doors. The closed session was over. Nancy, accompanied by the judge advocate and her counsel, preceded the crowd back into the courtroom.

"The court in this instance, when so grave an issue is at stake, has decided not to accept hearsay evidence," announced the presiding officer, as soon as all noise in the room had ceased.

Warren drew a long breath of relief. "Then I demand that Symonds' testimony relating to the despatch be stricken from the records."

"Not so fast, Mr. Senator," sternly admonished the colonel. "It is possible to get direct evidence in regard to Captain Lloyd's capture of that despatch. You forget, sir, that he was accompanied by Belden, one of Colonel Young's scouts. Mr. Judge Advocate, you are directed by the court to telegraph to General Sheridan's headquarters, requesting that the said Belden be

THE LOST DESPATCH

detached and sent back to Washington to testify before this court; or, if that is not possible, that his deposition in the matter be taken and forwarded to us. It is three o'clock, gentlemen; the court will adjourn until to-morrow morning."

CHAPTER XXII

WEAVING THE WEB

THE court convened promptly at nine o'clock the next morning. The first witness summoned by the judge advocate was Doctor Ward. After the usual preliminaries had been gone through with, he testified that he had reached Mrs. Lane's boarding house five minutes after Symonds' message had been delivered to him. He was shown at once to Captain Lloyd's room.

"I hastily examined Captain Lloyd, and found there was no hope of resuscitating him. He had apparently been dead for some hours," continued the doctor, in answer to a question put by the judge advocate. "I then turned my attention to Major Goddard, who was still lying on the floor. There were two single beds in the room, and Symonds and I lifted the major on to his, after I had dressed his wound."

"Kindly describe Major Goddard's condition when you first examined him."

THE LOST DESPATCH

"Major Goddard lay with his head on the hearth. Apparently in falling he had struck the side of his head against the sharp edge of the iron fender. It had made a jagged cut, which bled profusely. The blow undoubtedly stunned him; but I think his long unconsciousness was due to the loss of blood caused by a hemorrhage from the nose."

"What do you think caused his fall?"

"Possibly vertigo. The hemorrhage points to that. Major Goddard was in a weakened condition before his fall from wounds received about the head from an explosion of an old-fashioned pistol some time in February, which had blinded him."

"Is Major Goddard totally blind?"

"At present he is, sir."

"Is there then a prospect of his regaining his sight?"

"It is just possible." Ward's eyes traveled in Nancy's direction. "I do not consider his case entirely hopeless." He smiled in sympathy, as her eyes lighted with pleasure.

The judge advocate paused to make an entry on his pad, then resumed his examination. "What did you do next, Doctor?"

"I sent a note to the United States Sanitary

WEAVING THE WEB

Commission, asking them to send me a nurse at once."

"Did the Secret Service agent, John Symonds, speak to you of a pocketbook or a despatch?"

"He did, sir. Said that they were both missing from Captain Lloyd's coat pocket. I helped him search the rooms for them, but could find no trace of either of them."

"What did you do after the arrival of the provost marshal?"

"I conferred with him about Captain Lloyd. Considering the mystery surrounding his sudden death, we both deemed it expedient to hold an autopsy at once; so his body was removed to the city morgue."

"Did you hold the said autopsy?"

"I did, sir, in the presence of the coroner and Surgeon McBride. Here is the report of the result." He searched among his papers, and handed one of the sheets to the judge advocate, who, before inserting it in his book, read its contents aloud:

"After a prolonged and careful examination we found no wound or mark of violence on Captain Lloyd's body; nor any trace of poison in his system. Therefore, we are obliged to believe, in the absence of any particular

THE LOST DESPATCH

symptom or pathological appearance, that he died from some cause or causes to us unknown.

"It is just possible that the last five days in the saddle without sufficient food or sleep might have produced a paralysis of the heart which left no symptom.

"WILLIAM MCBRIDE,

"Surgeon, Kalorama Hospital.

"JAMES RICHARDS, M. D.,

"Coroner, District of Columbia."

March 7th, 1865.

"I see that you have not signed this report, Doctor," exclaimed the judge advocate, in surprise.

"I did not entirely agree with my colleagues," explained Doctor Ward. "I contend that the symptoms would be the same if Captain Lloyd had been suffocated by some anæsthetic such as chloroform."

"Did you detect any odor of chloroform about Captain Lloyd?"

"No. It evaporates quickly, and the room was well ventilated by currents of fresh night air from the open window."

"Did you find a bottle which might have contained chloroform anywhere in Captain Lloyd's apartment?"

"No, sir; but, then, I did not look for such a bottle until after the autopsy."

WEAVING THE WEB

"Could it have been removed in the interval?"

"Possibly; but I hardly think it likely. The provost marshal had placed all the boarders and Mrs. Lane under arrest, and stationed a guard about the house. No one could enter the captain's two rooms, except," remembering Baker's intrusion, "the head of the Secret Service Bureau, and officers of the provost guard."

"I have no further questions to ask you now, Doctor. Mr. Senator, will you take the witness?"

Warren, who had followed Ward's testimony with the closest attention, tore off a sheet from his pad, and passed it over to the judge advocate to read aloud.

"Is it not possible that Captain Lloyd died from apoplexy, Doctor?"

"No, Mr. Senator. I examined the brain, and found no indication of apoplexy, although there was a slight, very slight congestion noticeable at the base of the brain."

Warren quickly wrote another question, and handed it to the judge advocate, who was busy entering his first question and its answer in his record.

"Symonds testified yesterday that Captain Lloyd lay in bed as if asleep. If he had

THE LOST DESPATCH

been suffocated, would not convulsions have ensued?"

"Some muscular contractions," admitted Ward, "but not enough to throw off the heavy quilt which Symonds told me covered his body when he first approached Captain Lloyd."

Again Warren wrote another question, which the judge advocate read aloud after a moment's pause.

"Are you willing to swear, Doctor Ward, that Captain Lloyd could not possibly have died from natural causes?"

"Natural causes?" echoed the doctor. "I don't catch your meaning, Mr. Senator. A man's natural state is living. It is unnatural for him to die."

Quickly Warren's hand traveled over the paper; then he tossed the slip to the judge advocate.

"I will amend my question," read the latter. "Do you think it possible that the captain died from one of the diseases of nature, such as heart failure, and so on?"

"No, Mr. Senator, I do not," declared Ward positively. "I am willing to go on oath that Captain Lloyd was killed by a person or persons unknown."

WEAVING THE WEB

Warren reddened, and bit his lip. "I have no further questions to ask," he said abruptly.

"Does the court desire to examine this witness?" inquired the judge advocate. The president replied in the negative, and Ward was then excused. The next witness was Coroner Richards, who stated that, in his opinion, Captain Lloyd might have died from an attack of heart failure superinduced by the fatigue of five days in the saddle with insufficient food or sleep. His testimony was corroborated by Surgeon McBride. Warren refused to cross-examine the surgeon, and he was excused. He was followed on the stand by Mrs. Lane, a tall, raw-boned woman of middle age.

"How long have you kept your boarding house on F Street?" asked the judge advocate, after Mrs. Lane had been duly sworn and had answered the usual questions as to her full name, age, and length of residence in Washington.

"Six years," was the brief reply. Mrs. Lane never wasted words, if she could help it.

"For how long a time had Captain Lloyd boarded with you?"

"He took the rooms with me the middle of last December, but did not spend much of his time in Washington."

THE LOST DESPATCH

"Was he a good tenant?"

"Yes, sir," with more enthusiasm. "He was quiet, never found fault, and always paid promptly."

"Do you usually supply your boarders with sitting room and bedroom?"

"Oh, no. Captain Lloyd told me he desired privacy; and, as he offered me fair payment for the two bedrooms, I moved the bed and bureau out of the front room and put them in Captain Lloyd's own bedroom, because he often had men stay nights with him. I fixed up the front room as a sitting room. He had his meals served there whenever he came back in time for them; he wasn't very regular about returning for them, and spent most of his days out of the house."

"When did Major Goddard first come to visit his friend, Captain Lloyd?"

"About the last of January. Captain Lloyd sent for me and asked me to get the extra bed ready, which I did," she supplemented.

"Did you ever hear Captain Lloyd and Major Goddard quarreling?"

"No, sir; I never did."

"Did they seem to be on good terms *all* the time, Mrs. Lane?" with emphasis.

"Yes. They were the best of friends. Sev-

WEAVING THE WEB

eral of my boarders spoke to me of it. Captain Lloyd was so stand-offish and morose that they could not understand Major Goddard's affection for him."

"Was Captain Lloyd on good terms with your other boarders?"

"I believe he was. I never heard otherwise, but he did not see much of anyone in the house."

"Did he receive many visitors?"

"No, sir; only members of the Secret Service, or army officers."

"When did you last see Captain Lloyd alive?"

"On the afternoon of March sixth. I did not know he had returned to town until he sent word by my cook that he would like a cold lunch."

"Why did he send that message by the cook?"

"Because I had discharged my two worthless maids that afternoon, and the new ones I had engaged hadn't come. The cook was the only servant I had in the house that afternoon."

"Did your cook carry Captain Lloyd's lunch up to him?"

"No, I did. The cook only let him in when he returned."

"Did Captain Lloyd look ill when you saw him that afternoon?"

"No, indeed; only very tired. He told me he

THE LOST DESPATCH

was half dead for want of sleep and could hardly keep his eyes open."

"Was Major Goddard with him?"

"No, sir. Major Goddard had gone out driving before Captain Lloyd returned."

"Did you let Major Goddard in when he got back from his drive?"

"No, sir. Captain Lloyd had given his latch key to the major before the latter left Winchester. So the attendant who accompanied Major Goddard used the latch key and they let themselves in that afternoon."

"Is it your custom to give latch keys to your boarders?"

"I don't do it usually, sir; but Captain Lloyd was in and out of the house at all hours."

"Did you hear any unusual noise in Captain Lloyd's room that afternoon or night?"

"No, sir, I did not. As I said before, the cook was the only servant in the house, and I had to help her in the kitchen."

"Do you know the accused?"

"I do, sir."

"When did you last see her and where?"

"I saw her on the afternoon of the sixth of March when she came to my house to see her friend, Miss Alice Cary."

WEAVING THE WEB

Her words created a small sensation, and the President had to rap repeatedly for order before quiet was restored. Nancy had told Warren in their interview on Sunday that she had been to the boarding-house, so he was prepared for the testimony, and no one could read from his expressionless face what he thought of the new development.

"Did the accused see you?" asked the judge advocate.

"She did," retorted Mrs. Lane. "I let her in."

"Did she go into your parlor?"

"No, sir. She came just as dinner was being served. I told her that Miss Cary was out, but that she had left word she would be back by half-past five. Miss Newton seemed very anxious to see Miss Cary, so I told her to go right to her friend's room and wait there."

"Where is Miss Cary's room located?"

"On the third floor, back."

"Wasn't it unusual to send her upstairs instead of having her wait in the parlor?"

"No, indeed. She and Miss Cary are very intimate, and they often spend the day together, either at my house or at Miss Metoaca Newton's."

"Did the accused have a bundle with her?"

THE LOST DESPATCH

"She did."

"Was it a bottle?" eagerly. The court and spectators leaned forward to catch the reply.

"I couldn't tell, sir. It *seemed* to be a box of candy."

"What made you think that?"

"The way her dog kept smelling at it, and then it was shaped like a box."

"Did the dog accompany the accused into the house?"

"He did. I don't mind Misery. He's a good dog, as dogs go, and doesn't give me any trouble."

"Have you any questions to ask the witness, Mr. Senator?"

For reply Warren handed a sheet of paper to the judge advocate who read the two questions written on it slowly and one at a time.

"What did Captain Lloyd eat for lunch?"

"Let me see?" Mrs. Lane considered for a moment. "Cold bread, ham, pickles, and ginger bread—oh, and a cup of coffee."

"Did Captain Lloyd eat very heartily?"

"Well, he ate every scrap I sent up. Aunt Dinah brought the tray down stairs with her when she came back from telling the captain that Sy-

WEAVING THE WEB

monds wished to see him. There wasn't a morsel of food left on the plates."

"That is all," announced Warren; and at a signal from the judge advocate, Mrs. Lane left her chair and hastened out of the room.

Mrs. Warren, who had come with Mrs. Bennett, was sick at heart. It was obvious to all that her husband was fighting against heavy odds. A whisper here, a look there, showed that every spectator in the room thought Nancy guilty.

Mrs. Lane's place was taken by Mrs. Lewis, a frail, old lady whose timorous voice could hardly be heard as the judge advocate administered the oath to her.

"Now, Mrs. Lewis, will you please speak louder in answering my questions?" requested the judge advocate. "Do you board at Mrs. Lane's?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where is your room?"

"On the third floor, front."

"Do you know the accused?"

"I do." Mrs. Lewis wiped her eyes; she was easily moved to tears.

"When did you last see her, and where?"

THE LOST DESPATCH

"On the sixth of March, last——"

"Go on, madam," urged the judge advocate, as her voice died away.

"I finished my dinner—I did not stay for desert—and went upstairs to my room. I stopped a moment when I reached the second floor to rest—my breath is short these days—and I saw Miss Newton coming toward me from the back hall——"

"Well, what then?" impatiently.

"I—I—know her aunt very well, and Nancy stopped to ask how I was."

"Did she state what she was doing there?"

"Yes, sir. She told me she was waiting for Alice Cary, and had run down the back stairs to look for her dog, Misery, who she thought had probably sneaked down to the kitchen. We went upstairs together, and I went on to my room alone."

"Did the accused find her dog?"

"I reckon she did, though he wasn't in the hall then, because shortly after she rapped at my door to ask me to tell Alice Cary she couldn't wait any longer for her, and Misery came into my room while we were talking."

The judge advocate cleared his throat, and spoke impressively.

WEAVING THE WEB

"Did the accused have a bottle and a pocket book in her hands?"

"I—I—can't say positively," stammered Mrs. Lewis, doubtfully. "It—it was dark in the hall, and I am quite near-sighted."

"How was the accused dressed when you saw her the first time?"

"She had on her hat, but no coat. The last time I saw her she was dressed for the street."

"Did you notice anything unusual about the accused when you met her in the hall?"

"She looked excited and frightened, and very pale."

The judge advocate smiled with satisfaction; he was piling up damaging facts against Nancy. He signed to Warren to cross-examine the witness; but his smile changed to a frown when he read Warren's first question.

"Will you kindly explain to this court how you could see in a dark hall that Miss Newton 'looked excited and frightened, and very pale,' when you have just testified that you are too near-sighted to have seen so large an object as a bottle or a pocket-book in Miss Newton's hands?"

"I do—don't understand?" quavered Mrs. Lewis. The judge advocate repeated the question with more emphasis.

THE LOST DESPATCH

"I guess I just thought she looked excited and frightened," admitted the confused old lady reluctantly.

"That is all," exclaimed Warren, and Mrs. Lewis left the chair dissolved in tears.

CHAPTER XXIII

SENSATIONAL EVIDENCE

TURNING quickly, the judge advocate gave an order in an undertone to an attendant, who saluted and then followed Mrs. Lewis out into the hall. Warren leaned forward and spoke an encouraging word to Nancy; then settled back in his chair and fidgeted uneasily with his papers. He glanced covertly at her. Surely her frank, fearless eyes, her unruffled demeanor, hid no criminal act; and yet . . . Angry with himself for permitting a doubt, he pulled out his watch and glanced at its face. A quarter of two . . .

At that moment the attendant reëntered the room, and delivered a message to the judge advocate, who rose and announced that the next witness called to the stand was Major Robert Goddard. All eyes were turned to the entrance as the folding doors opened and Goddard stepped into the room, leaning on his attendant's arm.

Wasted by his illness, Goddard's uniform hung

THE LOST DESPATCH

loosely on him. He looked so changed, so pallid and worn, that Nancy dug her nails into her flesh to keep from crying. The attendant quickly guided him to the witness chair, then retired to the back of the room as the judge advocate stepped forward to administer the oath.

When the ceremony was over, Goddard sat down, and, leaning on his sword hilt, turned his head slowly, as if, not seeing, he were trying to locate by ear some familiar presence. Warren read his meaning, and in pity leaned forward and addressed Nancy by name. As her clear voice answered, Goddard turned instantly in her direction, and a quick bright smile lighted his wan face. Nancy half rose, but Warren's detaining hand checked her; and suddenly realizing that she was watched by dozens of curious eyes, she blushed hotly. Her confusion was noticed by the judge advocate, who smiled grimly to himself.

"State your full name, rank, and regiment," he began.

"Robert Goddard, Major, ——th U. S. Cavalry."

"Your age and the year of your graduation from the Military Academy?"

"Thirty-five. I graduated from West Point in 1850."

SENSATIONAL EVIDENCE

"You know the accused?"

"I do, sir."

"When did you first meet her, and where?"

"I met Miss Newton on Monday night, the thirtieth of January, at Senator Warren's house."

"How long have you known Captain Lloyd?"

"We were school-mates together in New York. I should say I had known him for about twenty years all told."

"Have you seen much of each other in recent years?"

"Not very much. Our professions kept us apart."

"How did you happen to join him here?"

"I heard that he was here, and wrote him I was coming to Washington for a few days on leave, and he suggested that I room with him."

"Did Captain Lloyd tell you that he suspected the accused was a rebel spy?"

"He did, sir."

"And did you agree with him?"

"I did not."

"Have you had any cause since then to change your mind?"

"I object to that question," exclaimed Warren, heatedly.

THE LOST DESPATCH

"Objection not sustained," ruled the president. "Continue your examination, Mr. Judge Advocate."

"While in Winchester did you see anything in the prisoner's conduct which made you believe that she was acting as a spy?"

"No, sir; I *saw* nothing in her conduct which would indicate that." Only Warren's keen ear caught the slight emphasis on "saw," and he drew a quick breath of relief when the judge advocate did not press the question.

"Did you escort the accused and her aunt to Winchester?"

"I did, sir."

"Did you see much of the accused while there?"

"Miss Newton and her niece came often to see me when I was convalescing from my wounds. I returned to Washington in the same train with them, but I have not met either of the ladies since we parted at the depot."

"Major Goddard, are you engaged to the accused?"

"I have not that honor," with quiet dignity, and a ripple of applause sounded through the room. Goddard's eyes strayed in Nancy's direction, but he could not see the rich color which

SENSATIONAL EVIDENCE

mantled her pale face. She dropped her eyes instantly to hide their tell-tale message. If *he* could not see, others should not.

"When did you last see Captain Lloyd?"

"In Winchester, the day before I returned here."

"Why did he not come back with you?"

"He did not inform me."

"Where were you on the afternoon of Monday, March 6th, last?"

"I went for a drive with my attendant, Donnally, and did not return to Mrs. Lane's until some time after four o'clock."

"State to the court what occurred after your arrival at the boarding house?"

"With Donnally's assistance I went directly to my room. He informed me that dinner was being served, but I had no appetite and did not care to go in and join a lot of strangers. When we reached the door of our sitting-room I told Donnally to go down stairs and get his dinner; that I would ring for him if I needed his assistance. I then entered the sitting-room and felt my way to a chair by the fireplace. There is not much furniture in the room, and I was familiar enough with my surroundings to find my way about without much difficulty——" he hesitated,

THE LOST DESPATCH

"Go on," prompted the judge advocate. "Tell your story in your own way."

"I have no idea how long I sat in that chair, whether it was five minutes or half an hour, for I was deep in thought," continued Goddard. "Without any warning my nose started bleeding—a way it has since I was wounded in the face by the explosion of a pistol. The bell was in the next room, so I felt my way to the communicating door and into the room . . ."

"One moment," interrupted the judge advocate. "Was the door closed?"

"Yes, sir; but not locked. I should judge I was about half way toward the fire place, where I knew the bell was hung, when I became conscious that there was some one in the bedroom with me.

"I cannot tell you exactly what it was," went on Goddard, after a slight pause, "that made me think that. I stood still for a moment and turned slowly around trying to trace the faint, very faint sound I thought I had heard. Then I lost my bearings. I could not remember in which direction the door was, nor where the fireplace was located."

"Why didn't you call out?" demanded the judge advocate, sharply.

SENSATIONAL EVIDENCE

"I was too confused. Only the blind can know and understand my feeling of over-powering helplessness," declared Goddard, earnestly. "I stepped forward, tripped, and fell with all my weight, striking against the iron fender before I could save myself. I knew nothing more until I regained consciousness the next day and found myself in bed, with a trained nurse in attendance."

Everyone in the court room followed Goddard's story with breathless interest. Nancy never took her eyes from his face; she sat as if hypnotized.

"What did you trip over, Major?" inquired the judge advocate.

There was a perceptible pause; then came the answer, "A foot-stool."

"Could you tell whether the sound you thought you heard in the room was made by a man or a woman?" asked the judge advocate, laying down his pen.

"I could not, sir. It was too intangible to even locate."

"I have finished my direct examination, Mr. Senator. Have you any questions to ask the witness?"

Warren wrote his message and gave it to the judge advocate.

THE LOST DESPATCH

"Did you know that Captain Lloyd was asleep in the next room?"

"No, sir; I did not even know he had returned to the city," replied Goddard.

Warren handed another slip to the judge advocate, who read its contents aloud: "His hat and overcoat were found in the sitting-room later that night. You were in that room, were you not?"

"I was, Mr. Senator; but you must remember I could not see. I did not pass my hand over all the chairs or other furniture in the room; otherwise I might have found his overcoat and hat."

"Could not your attendant, Donnally, have seen them?" wrote Warren.

"Certainly, Mr. Senator; but Donnally did not enter the room with me. He was standing in the hall when I went inside and closed the door."

"When did you first hear of Captain Lloyd's death?" was Warren's next question.

"Colonel Baker came in the next afternoon and told me."

"I have no further questions to ask this witness," announced Warren, after consulting Nancy.

When Goddard retired, his place was taken by his attendant, Donnally. He stated briefly that he had only accompanied Major Goddard to the

SENSATIONAL EVIDENCE

sitting-room door; that he had not looked into the room, being in a hurry to return downstairs and get something to eat. No, he did not think it strange that Major Goddard did not ring for him. The major had said he was not hungry, and that he did not wish to be disturbed. He was not told that Captain Lloyd had returned. He knew absolutely nothing of what had happened upstairs in his master's room, because he had spent his entire time in the kitchen until he was sent for by the Secret Service agent, Symonds. Warren declined to cross-examine Donnally, and he was excused.

Symonds was then recalled to the stand. "Do you recollect, Symonds, whether the door leading from Captain Lloyd's bedroom into the rear hall was locked that night?"

"No, sir, it was not," replied Symonds, confidently. "It wasn't even closed. I found it ajar when I rushed over to open it, and call for assistance after I discovered Captain Lloyd was dead. And what's more," he added, "there was no key in the lock."

"Did you find any trace of the key?" inquired the judge advocate, quickly.

"Yes, sir. Doctor Ward wished to lock the room to prevent curious persons entering. So I

THE LOST DESPATCH

searched the room, and finally found it on the mantel in the sitting-room half hidden by the clock. I guess Captain Lloyd was too exhausted to look about for the key, and decided to lie down without locking the door."

"Were the other doors also unlocked?"

"Yes, sir. I have already testified that they were not locked," and Symonds looked bewildered.

"Are you sure none of the furniture was upset in Captain Lloyd's bedroom, Symonds?"

"Absolutely positive, sir."

"That is all, Symonds; you may go. Orderly, ask Mrs. Lane to step here."

It was after three o'clock, but the judge advocate's manner was so full of suppressed excitement that Colonel Andrews refrained from adjourning the court.

"I will not detain you long, Mrs. Lane," said the judge advocate briskly. "Kindly tell the court what furniture was in Captain Lloyd's bedroom."

"Two beds, two chairs, a desk by the window, and two bureaus," replied Mrs. Lane, concisely and without hesitation.

"Are you sure that is all?"

"I am."

SENSATIONAL EVIDENCE

"Which hall does Captain Lloyd's bedroom door open into?"

"The back hall, sir."

"And where does that lead?"

"To the back stairs which go down into the kitchen."

"Do these back stairs go up to the third floor?"

"No, sir; only to the second floor."

"So that you have to pass Captain Lloyd's door every time you wish to go to the kitchen by way of the back stairs?"

"Yes, sir."

"You may go, Mrs. Lane. Orderly, tell Major Goddard that his presence is needed here."

Goddard was not long in coming, and with Donnally's assistance again made his way to the witness chair.

"Major Goddard," began the judge advocate, turning over the leaves of his book, "in your direct testimony you stated that when trying to find your way out of Captain Lloyd's bedroom you tripped over a foot-stool. Mrs. Lane has just testified that there was not such a thing in the room. Symonds has also testified that not one article of furniture that *was* in the room was overturned or apparently disturbed in any way. Now,

THE LOST DESPATCH

sir, kindly inform this court what you really *did* trip over, and remember," he sternly admonished, "that you are under oath to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

Goddard grew white to the lips, and fingered his sword hilt nervously. Getting no answer to his question, the judge advocate repeated it. Still no reply.

"I will alter my question." The judge advocate's accusing voice rang through the tense silence. "Did you not trip over a dog belonging to the accused? I demand an answer, sir. Yes or no?"

For one brief second Goddard gazed with white set face in the direction of the judge advocate; then dropped his face into his trembling hand as he murmured: "Yes."

CHAPTER XXIV

A STARTLING DISCOVERY

MRS. WARREN, who had spent an anxious evening by herself, heard the rattle of her husband's latch key, and hurried out to the front door to meet him.

"Any new developments, dear?" she asked, as he stooped and kissed her.

Warren hung up his overcoat and hat before answering. "Let us go into the study," he suggested, and waited until they were closeted in the room before he spoke again. "Goddard has been placed under close arrest."

"Great Heavens! Why?" Mrs. Warren pushed forward a lounging chair. "Sit here, dear, you look utterly worn out."

"I am." The senator dropped wearily into the seat and stretched himself in comfort. "Baker insists that Goddard is an accessory after the fact." He ceased speaking, and drew out his cigar case and selected one of its contents. Mrs. Warren threw herself on the sofa near at hand and

THE LOST DESPATCH

waited in silence for her husband to continue his remarks. "The judge advocate, also, is firmly convinced that Goddard knows more of what took place in Lloyd's bedroom than he will admit."

"I agree with the judge advocate," admitted Mrs. Warren. "It was only too obvious this afternoon that Major Goddard was trying to shield Nancy."

"And by so doing he has accomplished more harm than good." Warren paused and watched the smoke from his cigar as it curled slowly upward. "And what is worse, he has *shown* that he himself believes she is guilty."

"But, oh, Tom, how he loves her!"

"Yes," Warren's face softened. "He lied like a man. I wish to God he hadn't been caught!"

"Tom—you—you—*don't* believe Nancy killed that man?" The question seemed forced from her.

Warren hesitated. "Nancy swore to me that she was innocent; and yet—the deeper we go into this affair the more evidence we find that she *only* could have murdered Lloyd."

"But, Tom, we have only heard the prosecution's side of the case, so far. Your defence will surely throw some light favorable to Nancy's cause."

A STARTLING DISCOVERY

Again Warren hesitated and twirled his beard with nervous fingers; then burst out, "I wouldn't give *that*"—he snapped his fingers derisively—"for my defence! Louise, except Miss Metoaca, there is not *one* person I can call as a witness in Nancy's behalf. God help the girl! My only hope is to shake or discredit the testimony of the Government's witnesses."

He glanced at his wife's shocked face, and added hastily, "To sum up the case against Nancy: let us grant that the prosecution has established a motive for the murder. Now, they have proved, mind you, *proved*: first, that Captain Lloyd's talk with Symonds in the hall could have been overheard, and that *no* one but Nancy could have understood to whom that conversation referred as no names were mentioned; secondly, that Nancy was in the boarding-house at that time on the floor above; thirdly, that later she was seen coming *from* the back hall, which Captain Lloyd's bedroom door opens into; fourth, that Captain Lloyd's door was not locked; fifth, that Nancy had her dog with her; sixth, that that dog was in the room at the very time Captain Lloyd was probably killed. Nancy gave Mrs. Lewis a plausible excuse for her presence in that hall when she said she had gone down stairs to

THE LOST DESPATCH

look for Misery, but I doubt if I can *prove* her statement. I have already seen the cook, Aunt Dinah, and questioned her as to whether the dog or Nancy were in the kitchen that afternoon, and the only response I could get from her was that she 'disremembered'."

"It is all circumstantial evidence," protested Mrs. Warren.

"Aye, my dear; only circumstantial evidence—but strong enough to convict her. I have not one witness who can refute this testimony."

"Why not let Nancy testify in her own behalf?"

"Nancy *can* testify in her own behalf and make a statement, but the evidence and statement will not be recorded. Besides, what weight will her unsupported word carry against a dozen witnesses?" asked Warren, bitterly.

"The coroner testified that Captain Lloyd might have died from heart failure. Perhaps Nancy entered the room just to steal the paper and found the captain already dead, and she dare not confess that she was in his room fearing they would not believe she had not killed him," argued Mrs. Warren, hopefully.

"My dear, if she made such an admission the court would lose no time worrying as to whether

A STARTLING DISCOVERY

she killed Lloyd or not. They would instantly convict her for being a rebel spy, and she would hang," returned Warren, grimly.

"Why?" blankly.

"Because if she admits stealing that paper, it is proof positive that Captain Lloyd's charges are true."

"Scylla and Charybdis!" ejaculated Mrs. Warren. "But you forget, Tom, that Lee has surrendered."

"And Joe Johnston has not," dryly. "The war is not over. Once convicted on such a charge Nancy need expect no leniency. I have just left Miss Metoaca—" A knock interrupted him. "Come in!" Then as his servant entered, "Well, Hamilton, what is it?"

"Doctor Ward would like ter see yo', suh."

Warren rose. "Is he in the parlor?"

"Yes, suh."

"Wait!" Mrs. Warren sprang up from the sofa. "Hamilton, show the doctor in here. I am going up to my room, Tom, and you and the doctor can talk here undisturbed." And with a swish of her skirts she disappeared up the staircase as the man-servant ushered the doctor into the study.

"How are you, Ward," said the senator, heart-

THE LOST DESPATCH

ily. "Stop, Hamilton, bring the doctor some refreshments."

"None for me, Senator, thank you all the same." Ward took the chair pushed toward him, and Warren turned his seat about so as to face his visitor. "I am sorry to disturb you at this hour, but I felt that I had to see you at once."

"Oh, that's all right. I am glad you came. I doubt if I can sleep to-night. The prosecution will rest its case to-morrow, and my work begins." He opened his cigar case and handed it to the doctor. "Won't you join me? Here's a match." He put an ash receiver on the table by Ward's side. "Have you heard of Goddard's arrest?"

"Yes. It is all over town by now; and Stanton is very much censured for placing him under close arrest. Major Goddard has won the people's sympathy."

"It is not surprising. His blindness, his evident infatuation for Miss Newton and desire to shield her appeal to the romantic side of human nature. I only wish it would have the same effect on the Court," growled Warren.

For a few minutes the two men smoked in silence; then Ward laid aside his cigar. "May I close the door?" he asked. "I have something of importance to say to you."

A STARTLING DISCOVERY

"Why, certainly." Warren started to rise, but Ward returned quickly from closing the door, and resumed his seat.

"I made a startling discovery to-night," he began. "I suppose I should take my story to the judge advocate; but I am convinced you are defending an innocent girl, and this information may help you to clear her."

"Continue," urged Warren, his weariness forgotten. Ward drew his chair closer to his interested listener.

"You undoubtedly recollect that Captain Lloyd was found dead on Monday night, March 6th, and that Symonds sent at once for me."

"Yes, yes," exclaimed Warren, impatiently as Ward paused for a reply.

"The next day I called to see Major Goddard in the morning, and again in the afternoon. To my intense indignation I found Colonel Baker talking to Goddard, with what results you know. Goddard's condition was such that I had to remain with him all night.

"When I rose to go the young nurse handed me my hypodermic syringe, saying that I had left it there that morning. I dropped the syringe into my overcoat pocket and thought no more of the matter. The weather turned mild, and I did not

THE LOST DESPATCH

use my overcoat again. But this evening I hunted through its pockets looking for a mislaid letter, and I found my hypodermic syringe. .

"I was considerably puzzled; for I have given many hypodermics since I used that coat. So I searched through the pockets of the clothes I have on and found the syringe I have been using constantly. Thinking the syringe in the coat pocket was the one I carry in my bag for emergencies, I opened the bag intending to replace it, and was astounded to find a syringe already there.

"Then I sat down and examined the syringe the nurse had given me. I found some substance remaining in it; made several tests, and discovered that it was a solution of curari or curarine."

"Curari!" echoed Warren.

"Curari, called variously 'curara, ourari, wooral', a deadly poison which leaves no trace when injected into the blood, or applied to an open wound or sore."

Warren's eyes were fairly popping from his head. "And you think?" he gasped.

"There is not a doubt in my mind but that Captain Lloyd was killed by an injection of a solution of curari," declared Ward, positively. "Every symptom, or rather, lack of symptoms, found at the autopsy points to its use."

A STARTLING DISCOVERY

"Realizing what I had stumbled across," continued the doctor, "I hurried over to the office of the Sanitary Commission, and they told me there that the nurse, Mary Phelps, was at the Central Hospital. When I reached the hospital I found Miss Phelps just going off duty. She said that she had found that syringe tucked between the mattress and the headboard of Goddard's bed when she changed the sheets. She supposed I had dropped it there the night before."

Ward ceased speaking, and in uncontrollable excitement Warren sprang to his feet and walked rapidly up and down the room.

"This ought to help, and yet I cannot see—I cannot see," he muttered; then wheeled on Ward, who was watching him intently. "Come, Doctor, haven't you formed some theory which may give me a clue?"

"I have," admitted Ward slowly. "It is one that may lead to very serious consequences. Curari is a poison that we Americans at present know little about. It is used by the South American Indians, who dip their arrow points in it. You can swallow a small dose of the poison and it will not hurt you. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to get this drug in this country. I only

THE LOST DESPATCH

know one person who possesses a small quantity of the poison."

"His name?" demanded Warren vehemently. "His name?" Then as Ward still hesitated, "Good God! man, do you realize that an innocent life may be sacrificed if you don't divulge his name!"

"It is that which induced me to come to you to-night, Senator," said Ward reluctantly. "The only man I know who owns that drug is my preceptor, Doctor John Boyd."

"Boyd!" shouted Warren. "Oh, preposterous!"

"That is what I thought—at first."

"Why, why, damn it, man!" exclaimed Warren. "Doctor John wouldn't do such a thing. He is just a hot-tempered, peppery old Southern——"

"Exactly, sir, and has been accused of passing information through our lines. Time and again he has been threatened with arrest."

Warren mopped his hot face; then dropped back into his chair. "Go ahead and explain your theory more definitely," he directed abruptly.

"Doctor John is devoted to Miss Newton. I don't doubt he has assisted her on many occasions——" Ward checked his hasty speech. He

A STARTLING DISCOVERY

did not wish to convince Warren that Nancy was a spy. *That* would not be doing her a service.

"Listen to me, Senator," he checked off his remarks on his fingers to emphasize them. "Doctor John Boyd is the only person who has any curari in this city—to that I am willing to swear. Miss Newton may have confided to him that Lloyd suspected her of being a spy, and that she feared him. Doctor John may have overheard Lloyd when he told Symonds that he had absolute proof of her guilt. He attends several of Mrs. Lane's boarders professionally, and may have been in the house at that time."

"Hold on, hold on; not so fast, man," cautioned Warren. "It is not likely Doctor John went about carrying poison in his pocket, and how was it possible for him to be there at the psychological moment?"

"You forget his office is next door to Mrs. Lane's; it would not have taken him five minutes to get the poison and reënter the boarding house. Secondly," as Warren still stared at him with unbelieving eyes, "Doctor John disappeared that night and has not been heard of since."

CHAPTER XXV

A THUNDERBOLT

THE court-room was crowded when Colonel Andrews called the court to order on Wednesday morning. Goddard's arrest had stirred interest in the trial to fever heat, and the authorities had been besieged by requests for cards of admission.

Mrs. Warren was late in arriving, having stopped in her carriage to pick up Mrs. Arnold and Mrs. Bennett, and she found that every seat was occupied. But the orderly at a whispered word from the judge advocate placed extra chairs for them near the center table. After thanking the judge advocate for his courtesy, Mrs. Warren turned and looked anxiously at Nancy.

The strain of the past two days had told on the girl. She looked haggard and worn, and her eyes were heavy from lack of sleep. She caught Mrs. Warren's eye, and smiled bravely in response to a friendly wave of the hand. She showed far more composure than either of her

A THUNDERBOLT

counsel. Mr. Dwight was visibly nervous, and Warren preoccupied.

He and Doctor Ward had talked far into the early hours of the morning, without coming to any decision except that it would be best to ask a stay of proceedings on the plea that new and vital evidence in Nancy's behalf could be procured. Warren hesitated even to do that. He realized all too clearly that he was between the horns of a dilemma. If it chanced that Doctor Boyd's motive for killing Captain Lloyd was to secure that despatch and thus protect Nancy, it would but establish her guilt as a rebel spy. No one would be likely to believe Boyd had committed such a murder unless he *knew*, and feared the despatch would incriminate her if allowed to fall into Union hands.

Since seven o'clock Warren had been scouring the city in search of a clue as to Doctor Boyd's whereabouts, but without success. He had seen several of the doctor's patients, who could only tell him that Doctor Boyd had been unexpectedly called out of town, and before going had notified them to send for Doctor Ward if they needed medical attendance during his absence. Warren met with no better success when he made inquiries at Boyd's house. After repeated ringing of the

THE LOST DESPATCH

front bell, and knocking on the basement door, the old housekeeper finally answered the door. On learning Warren's errand, she said that the doctor told her he was likely to return at any time; she had no idea where he had gone, he had told her to keep all mail for him.

Warren glanced impatiently at his watch. Miss Metoaca was to be the first witness for the defence, and he had promised to escort her to the trial. Realizing that he had little time to spare before the court convened, he called a hack, jumped into the vehicle, and was driven to the Newtons'. Miss Metoaca was ready and waiting for him, and on their way to Fourteenth Street Warren asked her if she could tell him where Doctor Boyd had gone. Her reply was discouraging. She had not seen or heard of him for weeks.

"I would give anything in the world if he were here," added Miss Metoaca, with emphasis. "He is devoted to Nancy."

Warren silently echoed her wish as he piloted her into the room reserved for the witnesses.

The judge advocate's first witness that morning was an elderly man who apparently did not relish his unexpected prominence before the public. He sat biting his nails and glancing uneasily

A THUNDERBOLT

at Nancy. When being sworn he was ill at ease, and his behavior created a most unfavorable impression on spectators and court alike.

"Your full name?" demanded the judge advocate.

"Oscar Brown."

"Occupation?"

"Druggist."

"Where is your drug store?"

"On F Street next the Ebbitt."

"You know the accused?"

"I don't exactly know Miss Newton," he grinned deprecatingly, "but I have put up prescriptions for her on numerous occasions."

"When did you last see the accused?"

"On the afternoon of the sixth of March, when she came into my store."

"Did she buy any drugs?"

"Yes, sir; a bottle of chloroform."

A gasp escaped Mrs. Warren which was clearly audible in the silent room. Warren had not told his wife of Doctor Ward's startling discovery, and Brown's testimony was a distinct shock to Nancy's tender-hearted and loyal friend.

"Did the accused state why she required chloroform?"

THE LOST DESPATCH

"She did, sir. Otherwise I would not have sold it to her. She said her cat had been run over and she wished to put it out of its misery. Miss Newton is so well known, and her character then was respectable——"

"I object," challenged Warren instantly.

"Objection sustained. Witness, do not indulge in reflections. Confine yourself to answering the judge advocate's questions as briefly as possible," ordered Colonel Andrews sternly.

"Yes, sir"—much abashed.

"Had the accused a bundle in her hand when she entered your store?"

"No, sir. I put the bottle of chloroform in an empty candy box for her, as she said it was awkward carrying a round bottle, and she feared she would drop it."

"Indeed!" The judge advocate's satisfaction was apparent. "State the exact time the accused was in your store."

"About a quarter to four, as far as I can remember. I did not enter the sale in my books at the time because Miss Newton said she was in a hurry."

"Have you any questions to ask the witness, Mr. Senator?" asked the judge advocate. For answer Warren handed him a folded paper which

A THUNDERBOLT

he read aloud: "Was that the first time you sold chloroform to Miss Newton?"

"I can't say. It might have been. I do a large business," was the evasive reply.

"Answer yes or no," thundered Colonel Andrews.

Cowed by the president's manner, Brown answered sullenly, "No."

"How many times have you sold her chloroform?" read Warren's next question.

"At least three times."

"Since the new year?"

"Before and since; yes, sir."

"Did she state for what purpose she needed the drug?"

"Doctor John Boyd sent her to buy it for him when he was in a great hurry. Doctor Boyd had a class of young ladies who were learning first-aid to the injured, and Miss Newton acted as his assistant at the clinics."

At the man's words Warren started as if stung. A horrible possibility had occurred to him. Suppose Nancy had visited the doctor's office as well as the drug store that afternoon! She was probably familiar with every article in the doctor's office. Could she have known about the curari? He passed his hand across his damp forehead;

THE LOST DESPATCH

then turned to the witness: "I have no further questions to ask you," and Brown beat a hasty retreat.

The judge advocate completed his last entry in his book, laid down his pen, and rose.

"The prosecution rests its case," he announced quietly.

After a brief consultation with Nancy and Dwight, Warren summoned Miss Metoaca to the stand. The spinster's eyes filled with tears when she first saw Nancy. She was devoted to her niece, and the signs of suffering in Nancy's face cut her to the heart. She had to clear her throat twice to get rid of a suspicious lump before she could be duly sworn. Though a witness for the defence, the judge advocate asked the first question, as is the custom in all courts-martial.

"Are you related to the accused?" he asked, when Miss Metoaca was finally settled in her chair.

"She is my niece, my brother's only child."

At that moment an orderly entered the room and handed a note to Warren. He quickly broke the seal and a muttered exclamation escaped him as he read its contents. He crushed the note in his hand, gave a few low-toned directions to his colleague, and left the room.

A THUNDERBOLT

Warren had prepared his questions, and Mr. Dwight handed them one by one to the judge advocate.

"Do you own a cat?"

"I do, or rather, I did. She had to be chloroformed, much to Misery's delight."

"Misery?" Dwight was confused; he was not familiar with Misery, never having made his acquaintance. "Who is Misery?"

"My niece's dog. He hated that cat."

The judge advocate frowned as he consulted the defence's next question. "State to the court the exact day, and why, you chloroformed her."

"Let me see—it was the afternoon of Mrs. Arnold's ball, the sixth. The cat was run over just before my niece went out, and I asked her to buy some chloroform, thinking I might have to use it."

"Was the bottle full when the accused handed it to you?"

"To the best of my recollection it was."

"Did the accused appear excited or nervous when she returned with the chloroform?"

"No, sir."

"At what hour did she return?"

"About twenty minutes past six."

"I have no further questions to ask this wit-

THE LOST DESPATCH

ness," said Dwight. "Do you wish to cross-examine her, Mr. Judge Advocate?"

"Miss Newton," began the judge advocate, "have you taken the 'oath'?"

"I was under the impression you had just administered it to me," exclaimed Miss Metoaca, mildly.

"I mean the oath of allegiance," reddening.

"No, sir."

"Nor the accused?"

"Neither of us, sir. We are law-abiding citizens."

"Are your sympathies with the Union or with the Confederacy?"

"They are divided," tranquilly. "I have relatives and friends in both armies."

"Are you a rebel sympathizer? Answer yes or no."

"I am, sir; like many other Washington women."

"And is the accused also a rebel sympathizer?"

"I cannot answer for my niece's feelings."

"Where was the accused on the night of December 27th, 1864?"

"She spent Christmas with friends in Baltimore, and did not return to Washington until the day after New Year."

A THUNDERBOLT

"Kindly give the names of these friends."

"Mr. and Mrs. William Murray, 24 Saratoga Street, Baltimore, Md."

The judge advocate made a note of the names and address.

"That is all, Miss Newton; you may retire."

As Miss Metoaca passed Nancy she bent over and whispered tenderly: "Don't worry, my darling; you will be acquitted." Then she was gone.

Mr. Davis rose. "May I ask the indulgence of the court," he said nervously, "that a recess be taken until to-morrow morning? Our senior counsel, Senator Warren, has been called away."

"Has he been called out of town?" asked the president.

"Oh, no, Colonel."

"Did he say when he would be back?"

"He told me that he would return as soon as he could."

"Have you further testimony to offer?"

"No, sir."

"I object to postponement." The judge advocate rose. "It is unnecessary taking up the valuable time of this commission, the members of which have been detached from their respective posts and regiments to serve on it. The Secretary

THE LOST DESPATCH

of War has directed that the hearing be terminated at the earliest possible date. If Senator Warren wished a recess he should have so stated before leaving the room. As it is, the accused is still represented by able counsel. If she does not wish to make a statement in her own defence, I will submit the case to the court."

"One moment," interposed Dwight firmly. "You forget, Mr. Judge Advocate, that your case is incomplete. The court has ruled that hearsay evidence will not be accepted. Belden, the scout, has not yet testified before this court as to——"

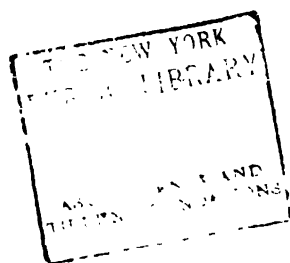
"I forget nothing," interrupted the judge advocate, heatedly. "The first charge can wait. The second charge of wilful murder has been proved against the accused."

"I deny it," retorted Dwight. "Without a motive you cannot prove a murder. The second charge hinges on the first; until that is proven the second cannot be——"

"I appeal to the court," broke in the judge advocate passionately. "I contend this is simply a clever ruse to gain time. Can you doubt it, you who have seen the rope tightened about the prisoner's throat"—involuntarily Nancy's hand crept up to her neck and plucked nervously at



“Another interruption stopped her . . . A hesitating
step crossed the threshold.”



A THUNDERBOLT

her collar—"by the testimony of reputable witnesses?

"Captain Lloyd, a gallant soldier, was foully murdered in the performance of his duty. You, his brother officers, have been told how the murderess crept down stairs, crept into his bedroom, stole the pocketbook containing the incriminating paper; then, fearing that he might still be able to prove her guilt, she leaned over the sleeping man—and silenced him forever. I tell you," he struck the table with no uncertain hand, "this has been proved. Let the counsel for the defence deny it if they can."

"We deny nothing." With set, stern face Warren, who had entered unnoticed some moments before, pushed his way through the crowded room. He passed Nancy, without look or word, and stopped midway between her chair and the seated officers. "We admit the truth of the judge advocate's statement."

A thunderbolt could not have created a greater sensation. The officers, as well as the spectators, sat dumb, bereft of speech. Nancy, grown deadly white, gazed at Warren with agonized, helpless eyes as his powerful, relentless voice rang out:

"The judge advocate has described to you how she stole step by step into that room with murder

THE LOST DESPATCH

in her heart, the guilt of former days lending courage to a desperate act. With stealthy tread she crept up to the bed, her hand fumbled for a moment in the folds of her dress, then drew out a syringe. Deftly, and with practiced hand, she thrust the hypodermic needle into the brawny arm which, once so valiant in the fight, lay helpless on the pillow.

"Calmly she watched the poison flow into Lloyd's veins; then stepped back and dropped the syringe between the head-board and the mattress of the other empty bed. As her hands closed over Lloyd's coat the hall door was pushed open—admitting only a friendly dog.

"Quickly she resumed her search, but another interruption stopped her. The sitting-room door opened. She started violently and stood with fast-beating heart. A hesitating step crossed the threshold. Gradually her breath came back and her guilty heart beat more slowly. A blind man could not harm her. She removed the pocket-book just as Goddard tripped over the dog. The sound of his fall aroused the stupefied figure on the bed. Faintly he whispered a name—a familiar name—the name of——"

A shriek rang out—the cry of a soul in torture! The spell-bound officers sprang to their

A THUNDERBOLT

feet. Spectators climbed on their chairs for a better view.

"Sit down! Sit down!" roared the judge advocate.

A figure tottered out into the aisle.

"Air! Air! I must have air!" The judge advocate stepped aside. "For God's sake, let me go!"

"That is just what we cannot do. Guard, here is your prisoner," and Warren caught Mrs. Bennett as she fell.

CHAPTER XXVI

BY A HAIR'S BREADTH

A GAIN and again Colonel Andrews demanded order in the court-room, but the spectators were utterly demoralized and refused to be quiet. It was only after Mrs. Bennett had been carried unconscious into another room that the confusion somewhat abated. Nancy, trembling in every limb, in the reaction which followed her terror and shock, collapsed in her chair, incapable of speech. Mrs. Arnold, whose complexion had turned pasty from her emotions, clung frantically to Mrs. Warren and begged tearfully to be taken home.

Colonel Andrews, purple in the face with his exertions, bellowed in a voice at last heard above the racket: "This unseemly behavior must cease! Major Lane, call the guard and clear the room!"

Silence quickly followed the order, and Warren turned and addressed the excited court:

"I ask your indulgence for precipitating such a scene. I returned to this room intending to ask

BY A HAIR'S BREADTH

a stay of proceedings so that I could have time to gather evidence against Mrs. Bennett; but, on hearing the judge advocate's argument against postponement, I saw my opportunity to force a confession from the guilty woman by giving details of Captain Lloyd's murder which would induce her to think there had been an eye-witness to her crime.

"Sitting there, confident that another was practically convicted for Captain Lloyd's murder, the shock of my unexpected words affected her as I hoped they would, and she betrayed herself."

"Is that the only evidence you can offer to prove Mrs. Bennett's guilt?" demanded the judge advocate, harshly.

"My next witness is Miss Mary Phelps, a nurse of the United States Sanitary Commission," was Warren's noncommittal reply.

After the usual preliminaries Miss Phelps told how she found the hypodermic syringe and why she gave it to Doctor Ward. She was then excused, and her place taken by Doctor Ward, who in a few concise words described how he discovered that the syringe was not his, and that it contained a solution which, on examination, proved to be a form of curari. He produced the syringe and gave it to the judge advocate.

THE LOST DESPATCH

As he left the court-room Doctor John Boyd's name was called, and the famous surgeon limped into the room and to the witness chair, followed by a low ripple of excited comment from the spectators which was quickly quelled by Colonel Andrews' peremptory demand for silence. When Doctor Boyd had satisfactorily answered the judge advocate's first question after being sworn, Warren began his direct examination.

"Doctor, are you acquainted with the poison known as curari or curarine?"

"I am. Some of the drug was given to me when I was last in South America. It is almost impossible to procure it in this country now."

"How many people knew that you owned this drug?"

Doctor Boyd reflected a moment before answering. "I am sure only two people beside myself—my former assistant and Mrs. Bennett."

Colonel Andrews had no need to call for silence; one could hear a pin fall in that quiet room as court and spectators bent forward, the better to hear Doctor Boyd's low voice.

"How did Mrs. Bennett learn that you had some curari?"

"She came in to my consulting room one day last November. I had just been making some

BY A HAIR'S BREATH

physiological tests, and the bottle containing the curari was on my table. After I had given her the prescription she had come for she asked me what the bottle contained.

"Curari is a curious poison, and one that is not much known, at least at this date. I explained that the South American Indians used it on their arrow points in the chase, animals killed by it being quite wholesome. I also told her that curari may, except in very large doses, be swallowed with impunity, but if introduced into a puncture of the skin, so as to mix with the blood, the effect is instantly fatal, and leaves no trace of poison behind it. She asked me how to obtain a solution of the drug, and I explained in detail; then, seeing she was ready to go, I rose and put the bottle of curari back on its shelf in the small medicine cabinet that hangs near my table."

"Is the cabinet kept locked?"

"No. My old housekeeper, Martha Crane, has charge of my private office and would not think of disturbing any of my belongings."

"Did you know Captain Lloyd?" read the judge advocate, pasting Warren's last question in his book.

"I first met Captain Lloyd on New York Ave-

THE LOST DESPATCH

nue one morning in January, but I saw him again that same night." The surgeon paused.

"Give a full account of that last occasion," directed Warren.

"I was attending a supper party at Senator Warren's," began Boyd. "We were having a pleasant evening when the bell rang and the servant told the senator that a gentleman wished to speak to Major Goddard. Senator Warren immediately asked Captain Lloyd to step into the parlor, but he declined, saying he preferred to wait in the hall for his friend.

"Suddenly I was startled by a half-stifled moan, and turned to see where the sound came from. Mrs. Bennett was crouching on the sofa behind me; her face livid, her eyes starting from her head. I followed her glance and saw Captain Lloyd standing directly under the hall light."

"Did Captain Lloyd see Mrs. Bennett?"

"No; we were sitting in the darkest part of the room, besides which he was too occupied in staring at Major Goddard and Miss Newton to notice anyone else."

"What happened next?"

"Major Goddard joined his friend almost at once and they went away together. Then, before I could catch her, Mrs. Bennett fell fainting on

BY A HAIR'S BREADTH

the floor. If ever I saw naked fear it was in her livid countenance when she gazed at Captain Lloyd.

"Naturally I was curious to know what connection there was between Mrs. Bennett, a society butterfly, and Captain Lloyd of the Secret Service, particularly as I was informed that she was a Union spy, but my professional duties claimed all my attention. And I forgot about the scene until it was recalled to my mind by Mrs. Bennett herself."

"In what way?"

"I was talking with her at the President's levee on March 2nd, and spoke of Major Goddard. She asked me if Captain Lloyd had returned to town with him, and I replied in the negative."

"Was that the last time you saw Mrs. Bennett?"

"No. I saw her on the afternoon of the 6th of March going in to Mrs. Lane's. My housekeeper, Martha," he added, before the judge advocate could speak, "told me, when I entered my office a few seconds later, that Mrs. Bennett had just left, having waited for me in the front office for some time."

"Is the communicating door between the office

THE LOST DESPATCH

and your consulting room kept locked when you are absent?"

"No, never."

"Then a patient could enter your consulting room without disturbing your housekeeper?"

"Yes."

"Did you see Mrs. Bennett waiting on Mrs. Lane's doorstep?"

"No, she was just turning the front doorknob and entering when I passed the house."

"Did she see you?"

"No, I think not. Her back was turned to me."

"Is your usual office hour at that time in the afternoon?"

"No."

"Then Mrs. Bennett knew that you were likely to be out at that hour?"

"Yes; she told my housekeeper that she had a bad attack of neuralgia, and had called on the chance of finding me in."

"Where have you been during the past month, Doctor?"

"I left Washington that very afternoon on my way to Richmond."

"Just a moment," interposed Warren, and handed another slip to the judge advocate, who

BY A HAIR'S BREADTH

read the question aloud. "Did Mrs. Bennett know you expected to leave town?"

"She did. I told Mrs. Arnold in her presence that I expected to go away at any moment, and did not know exactly when I would return."

"Continue your statement," directed Warren.

"I went to Richmond to see my brother. On my arrival there I found him in one of the hospitals, dying." Boyd's keen eyes grew misty. "I stayed with him to the end. I found my services needed in that unhappy city, so remained; but just before the evacuation I went over to Petersburg to assist in the field hospitals. I only returned to Washington this morning."

"When did you first hear of the charges against Miss Newton?"

"When I reached my house this morning I found Doctor Ward there making inquiries of Martha as to my whereabouts. We went into the office, and Ward told me of Miss Newton's arrest and trial, finally mentioning his suspicions that curari had been used. I sprang out of my chair, walked over and pulled open the door of the cabinet. The bottle of curari was empty. I also found on further search that one of my hypodermic syringes and needles, which I keep in the top drawer of my table, were missing."

THE LOST DESPATCH

"Did any one have access to your offices during your absence from the city?"

"No. I locked both the doors and bolted the windows of those rooms before I left that afternoon, and took the keys with me, knowing that I might be away from home for some time."

"What did you do on discovering the curari was gone?"

"Doctor Ward and I agreed that Senator Warren should be sent for. On his arrival we consulted together and decided that Mrs. Bennett must have killed Captain Lloyd."

"That is all, Doctor," announced Warren. "Mr. Judge Advocate, take the witness."

"Do you know any motive for Mrs. Bennett's crime?" inquired the judge advocate.

"Fear, deadly fear."

"Do you know what inspired that fear?"

"No, sir; I do not."

"You are excused." And the doctor, bowing to the court and to Nancy, withdrew.

"May it please the court to recall Major Goddard," said Warren.

"Major Goddard is under close arrest and cannot leave his quarters," replied the President.

"But there are no longer grounds for such arrest," retorted Warren, warmly. "He cannot

BY A HAIR'S BREADTH

now be accused of being an accessory after the fact. By President Lincoln's permission I was allowed to see the major this morning, and I say to you in all earnestness that his testimony is needed to clear up this mystery. I have here an order from the Secretary of War," extending a long envelope which had been delivered to him a moment before, "releasing Major Goddard from arrest."

Convinced by Warren's earnest appeal, the presiding officer despatched an orderly for Goddard.

Nancy's color had returned, and her eyes sparkled with relief and renewed courage as she talked in a low tone with Warren and Dwight during the short wait that followed. Goddard soon made his appearance, for his conversation with Warren had prepared him for such a summons. His whole bearing had changed. He entered the room erect and smiling, and despite his blindness moved with quick, decisive step as the orderly guided him to the witness chair.

"State to the court Captain Lloyd's *full* name," ordered Warren.

"George Lloyd Irving." His announcement caused low voiced comment, and Colonel Andrews pounded for order.

THE LOST DESPATCH

"Why did Captain Lloyd drop his family name?"

"Because he desired to lose his identity after a certain tragedy in his family."

"Give a full account of that tragedy."

"After graduating from West Point I was ordered West, and I did not see Captain Lloyd until seven years later. I found him greatly changed from the kindly, happy boy I had known in former days. After we had been together for a month we drifted into our old friendly ways, and one night Lloyd confided his troubles to me and why he had dropped his surname.

"Three years before that date, when on a visit in the West, he had met a very pretty, charming girl, became infatuated with her, and after a brief courtship they were married. Shortly after the honeymoon they both realized they had made a fearful mistake. She had married Lloyd for the social position his name could give her. She found that Lloyd hated society and would go nowhere. He was also comparatively poor and could not supply her with the luxuries her shallow nature craved. So they endured a parrot and monkey life of it. After the birth of their baby there was continuous friction, for Lloyd declared that to cut down expenses to meet additional bills they

BY A HAIR'S BREADTH

would have to live in a farm house which he owned near a village in New Jersey.

"They moved there and things went from bad to worse. Mrs. Irving hated the village people. Their church socials and the sewing circles seemed to mock her; for she craved balls and brilliant receptions. She never troubled to return the calls of the friendly farmers' wives, and finally she was shunned. Lloyd, who went to and from his work every day, was wrapped up in the baby, a sickly little girl, and paid but little attention to his wife's tempers.

"One day, driven to desperation by the monotony of her existence, for which she chiefly had herself to blame, Mrs. Irving decided to leave Lloyd. He had been sent to Philadelphia to investigate a criminal case, and was expected back the next afternoon. Mrs. Irving dismissed her servant, and at noon the next day, after writing a note to Lloyd, she shut up the house and trudged into town, reaching the station in time to catch the train to the city."

Goddard stopped his long narrative, and cleared his throat nervously. Nancy had never taken her eyes from him, and, as if he felt their appeal, he turned and spoke as if addressing her alone.

THE LOST DESPATCH

"Unfortunately, Lloyd was detained in Philadelphia by illness. When he reached his home he found his house closed, his wife gone, and his delicate baby *dead* from starvation and exposure in the bitter weather. His farm was on a little-frequented road; his nearest neighbor six miles away. No one had noticed the closed house; no one had approached near enough to hear the baby's cries.

"From that moment Lloyd was a changed man. He waited until after his child was buried; then started in pursuit of her unnatural mother. I do not suppose," added Goddard hastily, "that it ever occurred to Mrs. Bennett that Lloyd might be prevented from returning home that afternoon. She had no particular affection for the child, and decided that having a baby with her would be a drag. She also undoubtedly reasoned that Lloyd would not trouble to find *her*, but if she took the *child* away he would instantly institute a search for her.

"Lloyd spent months trying to trace his wife. Finally word reached him that she had sailed on an ill-fated ship which was wrecked, and his wife was reported among those drowned. Convinced that she was dead, he let the matter drop. But, knowing Lloyd as I did, I am convinced that, had

BY A HAIR'S BREADTH

he suspected his wife really was *alive*, he would have killed her, for he worshipped that baby. Many a night I have been wakened by his calling: 'Baby-tot! baby-tot!' in heart-rending tones in his sleep, as I told Senator Warren this morning."

"Why did you not relate this narrative when you testified yesterday?" asked the judge advocate, after Warren signified that he could cross-examine Goddard.

"Because I never connected Lloyd's unhappy married life with the cause of his murder. I thought his wife was dead."

"Did you ever see Captain Lloyd—Captain Irving's wife?"

"No, sir. You can prove my statements by going to the village where the child is buried. I don't doubt you can find some farmers who can identify Mrs. Irving."

"Then you have no direct proof to adduce that Mrs. Irving and Mrs. Bennett are one and the same person?"

"I have no such proof," admitted Goddard, "but any one of average intelligence——" His hot-tempered speech was interrupted by a request that the judge advocate see Mrs. Bennett, who had regained consciousness.

Interest was keyed to the highest pitch, and the

THE LOST DESPATCH

judge advocate's return to the room was hailed by a low murmur of suppressed excitement. He laid down a paper and announced gravely: "Mrs. Bennett has confessed."

For the moment there was absolute stillness; then spontaneous applause broke out from Nancy's friends, which was instantly checked by Colonel Andrews.

"In her signed confession Mrs. Bennett states that she is Mrs. Irving," continued the judge advocate. "She bribed a poor woman who was sailing on that ill-fated ship to assume her name, thinking it would mislead her husband should he try to find her. When she heard the woman was drowned Mrs. Irving considered that she was safe. She altered her appearance by dyeing her hair and by other artificial means. Her pleasing address and good education assisted her, together with a forged reference, in securing a position as companion to a rich invalid. Some months after that she heard of the death of her child, and she considered one of the links binding her to the past had been broken. Two years went by; then she met Colonel Bennett at Saratoga, and three months later they were married.

"Mrs. Irving states that she spent December and the first part of January in the North, and

BY A HAIR'S BREADTH

only returned to Washington the day before Senator Warren's supper party. On her arrival she had an interview with Secretary Stanton and agreed to find out and report which women in society were sending aid and comfort to the enemy. When she saw and recognized Lloyd she was panic-stricken; not only had she knowingly committed bigamy, a criminal offence, but exposure meant social ruin. And while only indirectly responsible for her child's death, she *knew* Lloyd, and realized that he would stop at nothing to revenge what *he* considered the child's *murder*.

"From that night she planned to get rid of Lloyd. It was easy for her to keep out of his way, for he was in Winchester most of the time. Then she remembered the curari—the poison that left no trace!

"Accompanied by Mrs. Arnold, she visited Major Goddard, and then found out where their rooms were located and how to reach them. Fate played into her hands, for on that sixth of March she met Aunt Dinah, whom she knew, having lived at Mrs. Lane's with her husband when he was first ordered to duty in Washington. Aunt Dinah, who was returning from executing an errand at Brown's drug store, told her that Captain Lloyd had returned and was lying down in his

THE LOST DESPATCH

room. Mrs. Lane had said he was not to be disturbed, as he was asleep. Aunt Dinah announced she was dead tired herself from answering the front door in addition to her other work. Mrs. Irving promptly suggested that she leave the front door on the latch, and she watched the old colored woman follow out her suggestion. At last the way was clear. Mrs. Irving knew the house; knew the hours kept by the boarders; if she was seen in the house she had a plausible excuse to explain her presence there. So she secured the poison and committed the murder as already described.

"Mrs. Irving declares that she stole the pocketbook thinking it might contain some papers which referred to her. She burned the case and its contents without examining them, such was her haste to get rid of what might prove incriminating evidence against her. She only took the pocketbook, because she dared not linger long enough to search Lloyd's other belongings, as she could not lock the hall door, and she was in deadly terror for fear some one would walk in on her.

"That is all in the confession which refers to this trial," ended the judge advocate, as he laid down the paper.

"I respectfully submit to the court," began

BY A HAIR'S BREADTH

Warren, rising, "that my client has been absolutely vindicated, and demand that she be released from imprisonment."

"The accused has been proven not guilty of the charge of wilful murder," said Andrews, slowly. "But, Mr. Senator, she has *not* been cleared of the first charge. We must first hear Private Belden's testimony."

The judge advocate rose. "I have here," he announced, taking up an envelope, "a telegram which was handed to me as I entered the room just now. I have not had a moment in which to read it." As he spoke he tore open the envelope. Quickly he scanned the lines, then read them aloud:

"Cavalry Headquarters, April 12, 1865.

"Captain George Foster,

"—th Infantry,

"War Department, Washington.

"I have to report that Private Belden was killed during the battle of Sailors' Creek, April 6th, 1865.

"H. K. YOUNG,

"*Chief of Scouts.*"

CHAPTER XXVII

WITH MALICE TOWARD NONE

THE judge advocate handed the telegram to the presiding officer as Warren stepped forward.

"I respectfully submit to the court," he said, quietly, "that the first charge against my client is quashed. You have ruled not to admit hearsay evidence. Symonds' testimony in regard to the securing of that despatch from Major Pegram is hearsay. Furthermore, he declares on direct examination that my client's handwriting is not the same as that of the despatch. My client has already been vindicated of the second charge; the first is non-proven. Again I demand my client's honorable acquittal at your hands."

The judge advocate rose to sum up his case, but his argument was interrupted by the entrance of an orderly who handed him a note which he read in haste; and he changed the words almost on his lips.

"May it please the court," he said. "I have

WITH MALICE TOWARD NONE

received word that new and most important testimony has been discovered relating to the first charge against the accused——”

“You are too late, Mr. Judge Advocate,” exclaimed Warren, hotly. “I have already presented my argument to the court. The case is closed!”

“Not so.” The judge advocate picked up a book from the table and read aloud: “‘The court may, in the interest of truth and justice, call or recall witnesses, or permit their recall at any stage of the proceedings; it may permit material testimony to be introduced by either party quite out of its regular order and place, or permit a case once closed by either or both sides to be reopened for the introduction of testimony previously omitted, if convinced that such testimony is so material that its omission would leave the investigation incomplete.’”

The judge advocate closed the book with a snap and laid it back on the table. “I respectfully contend that Colonel Baker’s testimony is necessary before this case is closed. Here is the colonel’s note, Mr. President,” and he passed the paper to Colonel Andrews, who, after perusing it, handed the paper to the other members.

“The court rules that it is both permissible and

THE LOST DESPATCH

necessary to hear further testimony," announced the colonel. "Call Colonel Baker to the stand."

Vexed and angry, Warren resumed his seat. Was victory to be snatched from him at the crucial moment. He dared not glance at Nancy, and sick at heart he listened to the judge advocate's slightly hoarse voice administering the oath to the new witness.

"Do you know the accused?" asked the judge advocate after Baker had given his full name and rank in the service.

"I do. I placed her under arrest as a rebel spy."

"What evidence have you to prove that fact?"

"This." Baker put his hand in his pocket and drew out a small red leather cardcase which was caked with mud. Nancy's eyes distended with fear, and she whitened perceptibly. "I have searched Miss Newton's house a number of times, but without success. To-day I decided to make one more effort, and so ransacked the place thoroughly. When in the stable I noticed that a red-brown field spaniel was doing a lot of snooping around in the rose garden, and I watched him for about ten minutes. Finally he located his bone and dug it up, and with it a tin box which contained this leather case."

WITH MALICE TOWARD NONE

Nancy almost cried out. Misery had betrayed her—her pet companion, her little dumb, loyal friend, whose companionship she had longed for for many days. She could hardly see Baker's movements through the stinging tears that surged into her eyes.

Baker took from the case a much-worn paper, and without further comment handed it to the judge advocate, who cleared his voice and read its contents aloud:

“Special Order { “WAR DEPARTMENT,
No. 17 { “Richmond, Va., June 25th, 1862.
(Extract)

“2 . . . The Bearer, Miss Nancy Newton, of Washington, District of Columbia, having volunteered her services, is hereby appointed as Special Agent of Confederate States Government, subject to the approval of this Department. Commanders of Posts, Officers of Guards and Patrols will render all assistance in their power.

“Quartermasters will furnish all necessary transportation.

By Command of the President.

Description

Age—21

Stature—5 ft. 7½ in.

Forehead—Broad

Eyes—Hazel

Nose—Rather short and straight

Mouth—Medium size

THE LOST DESPATCH

Chin—Round, with deep dimple
Hair—Red-golden
Complexion—Fair
Face—Oval

JAMES A. SEDDON,
Sec'y of War.

Silently the presiding officer accepted the paper, inspected it, then passed it over to the members of the court.

"Have you any questions to ask the witness, Mr. Senator?" asked the judge advocate.

"Who was present when you found that paper, Colonel Baker?"

"The provost marshal and two of his men," answered Baker; then added: "The leather case is stamped with the prisoner's initials."

"That is all. I have no further questions to ask," said Warren, and Baker departed.

"Do you desire to present argument, Mr. Senator?" asked the judge advocate.

Warren glanced at Nancy's averted face.

"The case rests on its merits," he said slowly. "The evidence is before the court; but I must plead that in reviewing it the court will remember the youth of the prisoner and her sex."

"Stop!" Nancy was on her feet in an instant, her slender form drawn to her full height. "It

WITH MALICE TOWARD NONE

is my right to make a statement in my own behalf. I desire no such plea entered. My sex prevented my taking arms in the field for the cause I love; so I strove to aid the Confederacy in the only way I could, by woman's wit. Like the Cause," her voice trembled, "I have failed.

"Gentlemen, I am a spy; that most despicable of characters. You are soldiers. You fight in the open and die, honored; I fight in the dark and die—dishonored. You fought for love of the Stars and Stripes; I for love of the Stars and Bars."

A brief pause followed as Nancy's clear, unfaltering voice ceased; then Colonel Andrews rose.

"The court is closed," he announced solemnly. "The findings will be sent to the proper authorities."

Nancy swayed slightly, recovered herself, bowed to the court, then turned blindly and followed the corporal of the guard out of the room. Silently the crowd dispersed; the shadow of coming tragedy stilling all desire for light chatter.

Nancy rose and paced the small prison room restlessly. Anything to get away from her own

THE LOST DESPATCH

thoughts. For forty-eight hours she had heard nothing from the outside world. She had not closed her eyes the night before, and Friday found her weary and unstrung by her long vigil.

She wondered dully when the sentence would be carried out. She hoped soon. She pushed her hair back from her forehead nervously. Her thoughts turned to her aunt and then to Goddard. Surely she would be permitted to see them; they would not let her face the end alone.

She had never thanked Senator Warren for all his kindness; all that he had tried to do for her, and all that he had accomplished. At least she was not branded as a murderess. And yet Goddard had thought her capable of such an act!

Nancy's eyes burned with hot, scalding tears that fell one by one; bravely her white lips hushed their moan. She must not lose her self-control. Resolutely she turned and straightened her few belongings. She was so absorbed in trying to forget painful thoughts that she did not hear the sentry open the door, nor a hesitating footstep that crossed the threshold.

"Nancy," said a pleading voice. The girl wheeled around, the carmine mounting her bloodless cheeks. Without a word she stepped forward and was clasped in Goddard's strong em-

WITH MALICE TOWARD NONE

brace. "Do not cry so, my darling," and he stroked her hair with loving hand.

"I must—I must—it is the first time I have given way," gasped Nancy between her sobs. "Oh, Bob, you don't know how I have wanted you; to feel your strong arms about me; to know"—her voice sank—"to know you love me in spite of all——"

"Love you!" the man's voice was rough with the intensity of his emotions. "I love you so it frightens me. God! Why am I so helpless? You are more precious to me than all the world, and I can do nothing."

"Do you call it nothing to offer to die in her place?" asked a quiet voice behind the lovers, and Lincoln, who had walked into the room unheard, closed the door.

Nancy's eyes shone like stars. "Did Bob do that?"—forgetting greeting in her excitement.

"Yes," replied Lincoln, seating himself on the edge of the bed and placing his tall hat beside him.

"You will let me, Mr. President," pleaded Goddard vehemently. "I am blind—helpless—my life will be no loss—I have served my country—while she——" Nancy clung to him in sudden

THE LOST DESPATCH

terror. "I give you my word Nancy will henceforth be loyal to our Government."

"Seems to me you are promising a good deal," said Lincoln, dryly.

"You *will* let me?"—eagerly.

"Die in her stead? No."

"And you are right," declared Nancy, as Goddard stooped over her to hide his bitter disappointment. "I will not accept such a sacrifice."

"'Greater love hath no man,'" quoted Lincoln softly. "You have warm friends, Nancy. Doctor Boyd was with me at noon. He told me that your father on his death-bed made you swear that you would do your utmost to assist the Confederacy. Is that so?"

"Yes." Nancy raised her head bravely and met unflinchingly the gaze of the saddest eyes she had ever seen in human head. "But it was not only that, Mr. President. Like all loyal Virginians, I loved and believed in the Cause."

"As I believe in *my* Cause, Nancy. Suppose we leave Cause and effect to our Maker; He knows and will not judge our errors harshly, for God is love. The fighting is practically over. Dear child, are you willing to trust to me to heal the war-hurt, and to accept the protection of the

WITH MALICE TOWARD NONE

flag again, the flag your forefathers died for?"

"Yes," said Nancy, brokenly. It hurt most cruelly to renounce *her* Cause; and Lincoln, ever quick to detect suffering, spoke to Goddard in an undertone as Nancy walked to the window to regain some hold on her composure.

"Ah, Nancy," he said, as she returned; "I was not surprised to hear Symonds did not recognize your writing. He did not know you were ambidextrous." An exclamation escaped Nancy. "You forget you once showed Tad that you have that gift—so your right hand did not know what your left one wrote." Lincoln laughed gently; then rose. "I left my wife in the carriage and I must not keep her waiting too long, as we are going to Ford's Theater to see 'Our American Cousin.'

"Major Goddard, I expect you to report to me to-morrow that your *wife*," he glanced mischievously at Nancy, "has taken the 'iron-clad oath of allegiance'—to us *both*." Lincoln stepped to the door and beckoned to Superintendent Wood, who was waiting in the corridor, to enter. "Superintendent, this prisoner is to go free. Here is her pardon, signed, sealed and delivered," handing it to the officer. "Good-bye, Nancy;" as he looked

THE LOST DESPATCH

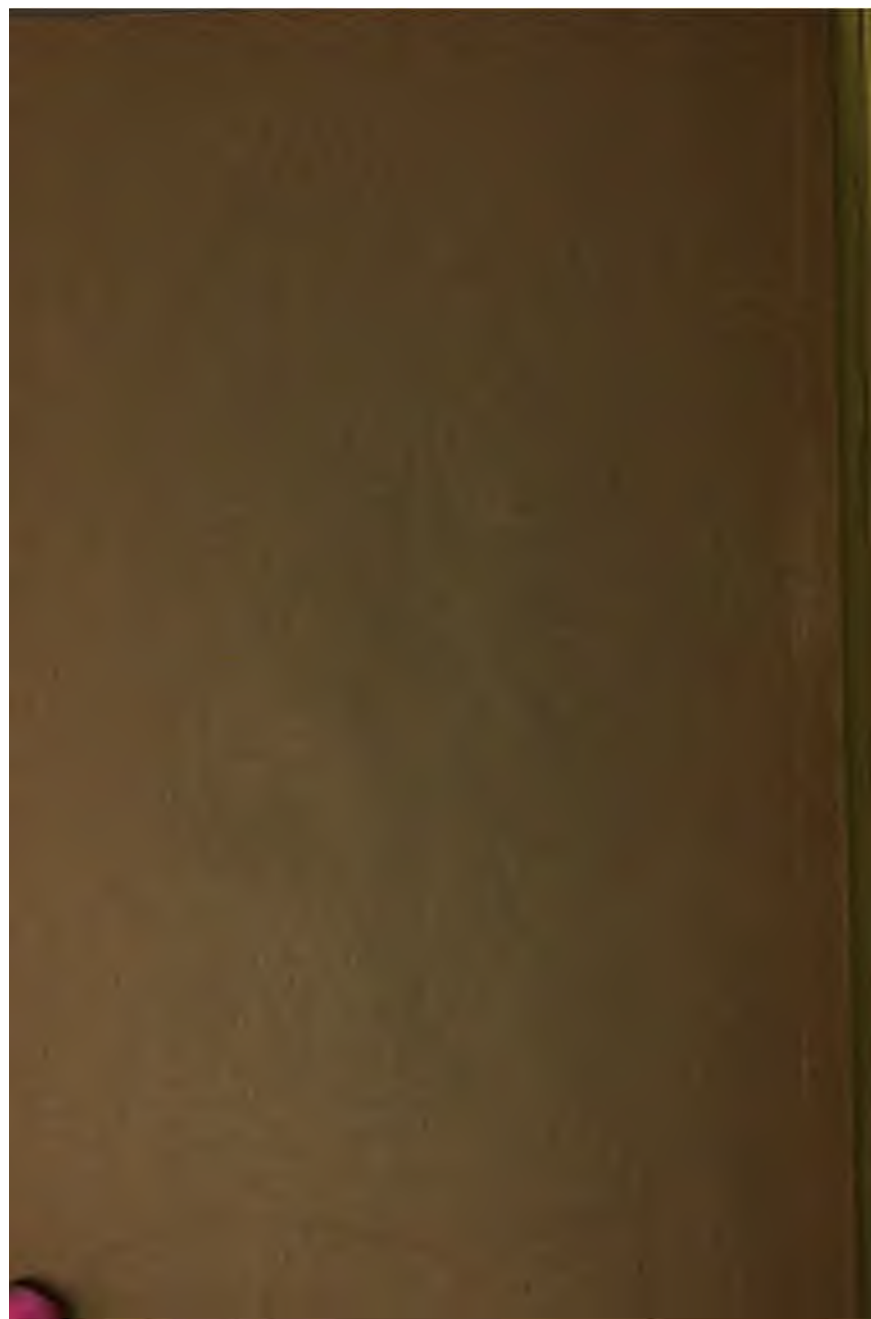
at the weeping girl his face was a benediction.
"God be with you until we meet again!"

Five hours later the Martyr President had
joined the Great Majority. Abraham Lincoln!
Man of the people! Sorrowing nations paid tribute
at his bier.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60
61
62
63
64
65
66
67
68
69
70
71
72
73
74
75
76
77
78
79
80
81
82
83
84
85
86
87
88
89
90
91
92
93
94
95
96
97
98
99
100
101
102
103
104
105
106
107
108
109
110
111
112
113
114
115
116
117
118
119
120
121
122
123
124
125
126
127
128
129
130
131
132
133
134
135
136
137
138
139
140
141
142
143
144
145
146
147
148
149
150
151
152
153
154
155
156
157
158
159
160
161
162
163
164
165
166
167
168
169
170
171
172
173
174
175
176
177
178
179
180
181
182
183
184
185
186
187
188
189
190
191
192
193
194
195
196
197
198
199
200
201
202
203
204
205
206
207
208
209
210
211
212
213
214
215
216
217
218
219
220
221
222
223
224
225
226
227
228
229
230
231
232
233
234
235
236
237
238
239
240
241
242
243
244
245
246
247
248
249
250
251
252
253
254
255
256
257
258
259
260
261
262
263
264
265
266
267
268
269
270
271
272
273
274
275
276
277
278
279
280
281
282
283
284
285
286
287
288
289
290
291
292
293
294
295
296
297
298
299
300
301
302
303
304
305
306
307
308
309
310
311
312
313
314
315
316
317
318
319
320
321
322
323
324
325
326
327
328
329
330
331
332
333
334
335
336
337
338
339
340
341
342
343
344
345
346
347
348
349
350
351
352
353
354
355
356
357
358
359
360
361
362
363
364
365
366
367
368
369
370
371
372
373
374
375
376
377
378
379
380
381
382
383
384
385
386
387
388
389
390
391
392
393
394
395
396
397
398
399
400
401
402
403
404
405
406
407
408
409
410
411
412
413
414
415
416
417
418
419
420
421
422
423
424
425
426
427
428
429
430
431
432
433
434
435
436
437
438
439
440
441
442
443
444
445
446
447
448
449
450
451
452
453
454
455
456
457
458
459
460
461
462
463
464
465
466
467
468
469
470
471
472
473
474
475
476
477
478
479
480
481
482
483
484
485
486
487
488
489
490
491
492
493
494
495
496
497
498
499
500
501
502
503
504
505
506
507
508
509
510
511
512
513
514
515
516
517
518
519
520
521
522
523
524
525
526
527
528
529
530
531
532
533
534
535
536
537
538
539
540
541
542
543
544
545
546
547
548
549
550
551
552
553
554
555
556
557
558
559
560
561
562
563
564
565
566
567
568
569
570
571
572
573
574
575
576
577
578
579
580
581
582
583
584
585
586
587
588
589
590
591
592
593
594
595
596
597
598
599
600
601
602
603
604
605
606
607
608
609
610
611
612
613
614
615
616
617
618
619
620
621
622
623
624
625
626
627
628
629
630
631
632
633
634
635
636
637
638
639
640
641
642
643
644
645
646
647
648
649
650
651
652
653
654
655
656
657
658
659
660
661
662
663
664
665
666
667
668
669
670
671
672
673
674
675
676
677
678
679
680
681
682
683
684
685
686
687
688
689
690
691
692
693
694
695
696
697
698
699
700
701
702
703
704
705
706
707
708
709
710
711
712
713
714
715
716
717
718
719
720
721
722
723
724
725
726
727
728
729
730
731
732
733
734
735
736
737
738
739
740
741
742
743
744
745
746
747
748
749
750
751
752
753
754
755
756
757
758
759
760
761
762
763
764
765
766
767
768
769
770
771
772
773
774
775
776
777
778
779
780
781
782
783
784
785
786
787
788
789
790
791
792
793
794
795
796
797
798
799
800
801
802
803
804
805
806
807
808
809
810
811
812
813
814
815
816
817
818
819
820
821
822
823
824
825
826
827
828
829
830
831
832
833
834
835
836
837
838
839
840
841
842
843
844
845
846
847
848
849
850
851
852
853
854
855
856
857
858
859
860
861
862
863
864
865
866
867
868
869
870
871
872
873
874
875
876
877
878
879
880
881
882
883
884
885
886
887
888
889
890
891
892
893
894
895
896
897
898
899
900
901
902
903
904
905
906
907
908
909
910
911
912
913
914
915
916
917
918
919
920
921
922
923
924
925
926
927
928
929
930
931
932
933
934
935
936
937
938
939
940
941
942
943
944
945
946
947
948
949
950
951
952
953
954
955
956
957
958
959
960
961
962
963
964
965
966
967
968
969
970
971
972
973
974
975
976
977
978
979
980
981
982
983
984
985
986
987
988
989
990
991
992
993
994
995
996
997
998
999
1000







AUG 10 1993

